Paganism in the Church

Selfstudie

ABSTRACT

This study examines the alarming shift within the modern church from Biblical truth toward a form of **neo-paganism**, characterized by the rise of the **"Super Pastor" cult** and the manipulative **Prosperity Gospel**.

By testing modern manifestations—such as the disorderly "falling in the Spirit" and the deliberate financial exploitation of the needy—against the Scriptures and the perspectives of apologists like Justin Peters, this research exposes a system of **spiritual narcissism** and psychological manipulation.

The study concludes that these practices do not reflect the work of the Holy Spirit but are rather a prophecy of the latter-day apostasy, where the focus has shifted from Christ's redemption to human greed and emotional spectacle.

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"I started feeling uncomfortable at social gatherings, braais, and parties when a 'Christian' would unexpectedly speak up and claim that what we were doing was pagan: *'You shouldn't buy Hot Cross Buns anymore.'* That's when I decided to conduct this study myself. Now that I truly understand the history and context, it is so easy to simply ask the counter-question: *'Why do you say that, and what is the actual origin of your claim?'*"

Foreword

In this study, we do not address the symbols and practices revealed by God to Israel through Moses. My focus lies elsewhere: on the growing trend within the **Western Modern Church** to blend **pagan** customs and modern idolatry with the pure Gospel.

We frequently hear that a Christian "may not do this or that" because it is supposedly pagan. However, in this zeal to eradicate outward paganism, we often become ensnared by the external and miss the core. It is like someone who refuses to eat vegetables because the pagans of old might have offered them to their idols. Such a person believes he is holy because his plate is "clean," while his heart is full of judgment and bitterness toward his neighbor.

Many Christians believe they are "free from paganism" because they do not celebrate Halloween, yet in the meantime, they worship their own **ego or wealth**—which is, in essence, the greatest form of paganism. When the outward rule becomes more important than the inward condition, the Christian is paralyzed. He loses his compass.

The painful consequence of this is the loss of our testimony. The Christian loses his **"salt."** He looks, speaks, and fights exactly like the world, but he does so in the Name of God. This renders Christianity irrelevant to a world searching for truth.

The Trojan Horse

- **The Outward:** It looks like a gift—something impressive and "spiritual" (the great wooden horse).

- **The Betrayal:** The danger is hidden on the inside. As soon as the horse is allowed within the walls of the city (the church), the enemy emerges and destroys the city from within.

KJV Scripture for Meditation:

Matthew 23:25-26 (KJV): *"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also."*

Paganism in the Church: Part I

Food for Thought

When tradition and truth collide, man is faced with a choice. This document is not intended to prescribe new laws or to curse the joy of the season. It is an invitation to look behind the curtain of the familiar.

We live in an era where the holy is often packaged in the raiment of entertainment. By tracing the history of our Christmas symbols—from the ancient pagan rituals of the North to the modern commercial machine of today—we discover a pattern. It is a pattern of blending: a little bit of the world, a little bit of history, and a little bit of Scripture.

"In our zeal to eradicate 'paganism,' we sometimes become ensnared in the external and miss the core. It is like someone who refuses to eat vegetables because the pagans of old offered them to their idols. He thinks he is holy because his plate is 'clean,' while his heart is full of judgment and bitterness toward his neighbor. We fight against the symbols of the world, but we welcome the spirit of the world—greed, power, and self-exaltation—upon our pulpits."

The questions we must ask ourselves are:

1. **Can the true Christ be honored through symbols originally created to appease other gods?**
2. **Have we allowed a "shriveled mannikin" to take the place of the almighty, holy God?**
3. **Are we engaged in worship, or merely a cultural ritual?**

Jesus cleansed the temple not because He was against people, but because He desired to restore the purity of His Father's house. May these facts serve as "food for thought" on how we keep our own spiritual temples clean in a world that tries to dim the Light with artificial glitter.

1 Thessalonians 5:21 (KJV): *"Prove all things; hold fast that which is good."*

Why this Approach?

- **It asks questions:** Instead of making mere statements, questions allow the reader to think for themselves. This is how Jesus often taught.
- **It acknowledges history:** It emphasizes facts (Odin, the Yule festival, commercialization) that cannot be disputed.
- **It places responsibility on the reader:** Information is provided; the decision on what to do with it lies between the reader and God.

When one studies the list, you realize how "saturated" the world system is with these origins. It supports the point that the "ruler of this world" (the spirit of this age) works very subtly. He does not necessarily change the names of everything, but he ensures people perform rituals without realizing who or what the original "spirit" behind them was.

Criteria for Discernment:

- **Factual Correctness:** Ensuring the history of pagan roots (Odin, Yule, and the evolution of Father Christmas) is accurately represented.
- **Tone and Balance:** Challenging the reader without coercion, addressing the individual's conscience.
- **Scriptural Alignment:** Comparing modern issues to the cleansing of the Temple or Nebuchadnezzar's image to reach the spiritual core.

An Important Warning

Not every tradition or symbol is automatically pagan. The test is always:

1. **Is Christ central?**
2. **Is Scripture the final authority?**
3. **Does it lead to repentance and holiness?**

"If the prophets cannot even agree on what God is saying, how can I believe anything that comes from that religion?"

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1. What is Paganism?

Paganism is a collective term for a wide group of ancient, mostly pre-Christian, nature-based religions. These beliefs flourished in Europe, the Middle East, and other parts of the world long before the spread of Christianity and Islam.

The term originates from the Latin word *paganus*, which literally means "country dweller" or "one from the land." In the early centuries of Christianity, the faith spread rapidly through the cities. People in the rural countryside were the last to cling to

their old gods; thus, the word *paganus* became a label for anyone who did not profess the Christian faith.

1.1. Historical Paganism in the Church

Many practices considered "Christian" today originated during the early centuries when the church merged with Roman and Germanic cultures. Historians and theologians often point to the following integrations:

- **Festivals:** The timing of Christmas is historically linked to the Roman *Saturnalia* and the winter solstice. Easter, in turn, adopted certain elements from fertility festivals dedicated to the goddess *Eostre*, of which the Easter bunny and eggs remain as remnants today.
- **Rituals:** The use of candles, incense, and certain liturgical vestments displays similarities to ancient priestly practices in the Roman state religion.
- **Veneration of Saints:** Some historians argue that the veneration of saints in the early church filled a psychological void left by the removal of local gods (polytheism).

1.2. Modern Neo-Paganism and the Church

In the 21st century, there is a marked shift away from traditional denominations toward nature religions (such as Wicca and Druidry) or a vague "spirituality without religion." The impact on the modern church is twofold:

- **Syncretism (Mixing):** Believers increasingly mix Christian doctrines with pagan elements such as astrology, the use of crystals, or a focus on "energy" and the divinity of nature (pantheism).
- **Eco-theology:** While caring for creation is Biblical, movements sometimes arise within churches where nature itself is "worshipped" instead of the Creator.

1.3. The Theological Debate

Responses within the modern church to these roots vary across three main streams:

1. **The Purists:** Groups arguing that the church must "cleanse" itself of all pagan remnants. For them, celebrating Christmas or Easter is unacceptable due to their origins.
2. **The Contextualizers:** Those who believe the church has successfully "Christianized" these symbols. For them, the current meaning—celebrating the Light of Christ—is more important than the historical origin.
3. **Prosperity Gospel as "Modern Paganism":** A growing group of theologians argues that the modern Prosperity Gospel is actually a form of paganism. It attempts to **manipulate God** through offerings and "sowing" to obtain wealth—precisely how ancient people brought sacrifices to idols in exchange for a good harvest.

1.4. Core Characteristics of Paganism

To understand the difference between the Christian faith and Paganism, we must look at the foundations:

A. Nature-Centered Worship

Paganism views creation not as the work of an external God, but as holy in itself. The focus falls on the sun, moon, seasons, mountains, and rivers.

B. Polytheism (Many Gods)

In contrast to the Monotheism (one God) of the Bible, Paganism assigns roles to various deities (e.g., fertility, war, weather).

- *Examples:* Zeus (Greek), Jupiter (Roman), Odin (Norse).

C. Cyclic Time

Paganism sees time as a circle: birth, death, and rebirth repeat themselves like the seasons. However, the Bible teaches a linear timeline: a beginning (Creation), a center point (Christ), and a final consummation (Judgment).

D. No Authoritative Text

Paganism does not have a "Bible." Traditions were passed down orally and differ from tribe to tribe, leaving room for subjective experience over revealed Truth.

Comparison Table: Christianity vs. Paganism

Feature	Traditional Christianity	Modern Paganism
Authority	The Bible / Divine Revelation	Personal Experience / Nature
Concept of God	Transcendent, Personal Creator	Deity is within Nature (Pantheism)
Focus	Salvation from sin through grace	Harmony with the earth and self-empowerment

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KJV Scripture for Reflection:

Romans 1:25 (KJV): *"Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen."*

1.5 The Biblical Perspective

From a Biblical standpoint, paganism is consistently associated with idolatry.

- **Exodus 20:3–5** prohibits the worship of any image or other god.
- **Romans 1:25** summarizes the core of the problem: *"Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator..."*

Early Christians often deliberately distanced themselves from pagan practices, even at the cost of their lives. Today, the Christian is challenged once again: Are we worshipping the Creator, or have we unconsciously slipped back into the ancient grooves of nature worship and self-exaltation?

1.6 Flee from a Distorted Image of God

"If Christians had displayed the image of their God better, it might not have been necessary for these people to reject that God along with Christianity. This has given rise to many religions and churches in the West, and Paganism is growing stronger."

A. The Name of God is Blasphemed

The Bible states directly that when believers (and especially leaders) live poorly, it gives the world a reason to hate God.

- **Romans 2:24 (KJV):** *"For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written."*
- This verse is nearly a direct mirror of your quote. If the "image" of God we display is distorted by divorce, abuse of power, and hypocrisy, the world believes that the God we worship is the same.

B. The Stumbling Block (Scandal)

Jesus warned very seriously against those who cause others to lose their faith.

- **Matthew 18:6-7 (KJV):** He says that it were better for a man that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea, than that he should offend one of these "little ones" (those who believe).
- When a "Super Pastor" falls into sin or makes his own rules, he creates a massive stumbling block that pushes people out of the kingdom.

C. The Power of Witness

The Bible teaches that people "see" God through the love and integrity of believers.

- **John 13:35 (KJV):** *"By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."*
- If the world does not see love, truth, or obedience in the church, they seek it elsewhere—and this is where **Modern Paganism** enters. Paganism often offers a "connection with nature" or "honesty about human needs" that people no longer find in a hypocritical church.

D. The Judgment of "Evil Shepherds"

In the Old Testament (**Ezekiel 34**), God denounces the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves and allow the sheep to be scattered.

- Because the shepherds did not care for the sheep, the sheep became *"meat to all the beasts of the field"* (which we can view today as pagan ideologies or false faiths).

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2. Pagan and Other Symbols, Rituals, and Customs in the 21st Century

Many of the traditions we consider "Christian" or simply "Western" today were adapted hundreds of years ago from ancient Germanic, Celtic, Roman, and Norse customs.

The early Church frequently employed a strategy of **inculturation**: instead of banning existing festivals, they renamed them with Christian meanings to ease the transition to the new faith. This demonstrates how culturally adaptable humanity is. Rather than traditions disappearing entirely, they usually just "change form" to fit a new worldview.

Here is a list of the major festivals with pagan roots:

2.1. Christmas (Yule & Saturnalia)

Although Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus, most of its customs originate from winter solstice festivals.

- **The Date:** The Bible does not mention a specific date. December 25th was chosen to coincide with the Roman *Saturnalia* and the festival of *Sol Invictus* (the Unconquered Sun).
- **The Christmas Tree:** This stems from Germanic and Scandinavian customs of bringing evergreen plants into the home to symbolize life in the midst of winter.
- **Mistletoe:** This plant was sacred to the Celtic Druids and was believed to bring fertility and healing.

2.1.1. The Christmas Tree

The Christmas tree is one of the most well-known symbols of the season, but it did not originally have a Christian origin.

A. Historical and Pagan Significance:

- **Origin:** The use of evergreen trees in the home comes from Germanic and Scandinavian traditions. These trees stay green even in winter, symbolizing that life and strength endure even during the darkest days.

- **Symbolism:**
    - **Protection against evil spirits:** Branches were hung over doors and windows to keep away evil spirits, ghosts, and diseases.
    - **Sun-god:** The tree often represented the sun returning after the winter.
- **Decorations:** The Germanic peoples hung food, candles, and small figurines on the tree as offerings to gods, such as **Odin**, to ask for blessings, abundance, and protection.

B. Integration into Christian Tradition:

- The early church did not forbid the practice but changed its meaning: the tree became symbolic of the **eternal life** that Christ brings.
- Today, it is a central part of Christmas celebrations, but the original pagan symbolism of protection, blessing, and sun-worship remains in the historical background of the tradition.

C. Biblical Perspective:

While decoration and celebration are permissible, the Bible warns against the worship of symbolic objects or rituals in place of God:

- **Exodus 20:3 (KJV):** *"Thou shalt have no other gods before me."*
- **Jeremiah 10:2-3 (KJV):** *"Thus saith the Lord, Learn not the way of the heathen... For the customs of the people are vain..."*

2.1.2. Mistletoe and the Kiss

Mistletoe is a plant that often grows semi-parasitically on trees, lacking full roots in the ground. It remains green even in winter and bears small white berries. It has long held symbolic meaning in various cultures.

A. Historical and Pagan Significance:

- **In Celtic and Norse traditions, mistletoe symbolized:**
    - **Fertility:** Because it can grow without soil, people believed it possessed supernatural powers.
    - **Peace:** Enemies who met under the mistletoe were required to lay down their arms.
    - **Healing and Protection:** It was regarded as a plant with the power to ward off diseases and evil spirits.
- **The Pagan Origin of the Kiss:** Because the plant grows on a tree without roots, it was believed to have supernatural powers. It was seen as a symbol of fertility and peace. If enemies encountered each other in the forest under mistletoe, they had to lay down their weapons and maintain a truce for a day. This later evolved into the "kiss under the mistletoe".

B. In Modern Christian Tradition:

- Today, it is mostly associated with romantic customs, such as the tradition of kissing under the mistletoe.
- The original supernatural or religious significance has largely disappeared, although the symbolism of life and protection still lingers subtly within the tradition.

C. Biblical Perspective: The power of God, not of plants, protects and blesses His people:

- **Exodus 20:3 (KJV):** *"Thou shalt have no other gods before me."*
- **Psalm 91:5 (KJV):** *"Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day;"*

2.1.3. The Yule Log

Many people know the "Yule Log" today as a chocolate cake, but originally it was a massive tree trunk. The Yule Log has its origins in pagan winter solstice traditions and was only later integrated into Christian Christmas celebrations.

A. Original Meaning and Use:

- **Ancient European Customs:** In Celtic and Northern European cultures, a massive log was lit during the winter solstice to celebrate the return of the sun.
- **Symbolism:** The fire of the log symbolized that the sun would shine stronger again after the darkest time of the year.
- **Practical Use:** The ashes of the log were preserved to protect the house from lightning, evil spirits, and other misfortunes.
- **Duration of the Ritual:** Originally, the log had to burn continuously for several days—sometimes up to 12 days—to honor the seasonal cycle.

B. Integration into Christian Tradition:

- The early church did not forbid the practice but reinterpreted it: the Yule Log became symbolic of the light of Christ coming into the world.
- Today, we often see it as a decorated wooden log or as a chocolate cake, but the pagan symbolism of the seasonal cycle from darkness to light is still present in the tradition.

C. Biblical Perspective: Any form of protection or blessing linked to objects or rituals instead of God is considered misplaced by the Bible:

- **Exodus 20:3 (KJV):** *"Thou shalt have no other gods before me."*
- **Proverbs 3:5 (KJV):** *"Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding."*

2.1.4. Carols

Carols are songs traditionally sung around Christmas, but they have a much older, pagan origin.

A. Original Meaning:

- The word “carol” comes from the Greek *choros*, which means “dance in a circle.”
- In ancient times, these songs were sung cheerfully and rhythmically during seasonal celebrations, often around sacred places or monuments like Stonehenge.
- The singing and dancing often aimed to honor seasonal cycles, celebrate the abundance of nature, or drive away evil spirits.

B. Integration into Christian Tradition:

- The Christian church did not forbid these songs but changed their meaning: they now sing about the birth of Jesus.
- The original circle dance and pagan symbolism have disappeared, but the joyful and community-oriented nature of the song endures.

C. Biblical Perspective: While celebration and praise to God are appropriate, the Bible warns against the worship of rituals or traditions without Scriptural foundation:

- **Matthew 15:8 (KJV):** *"This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me."*
- **Jeremiah 10:2 (KJV):** *"Thus saith the Lord, Learn not the way of the heathen..."*

2.1.5. The 12 Days of Christmas

The 12 Days of Christmas is a tradition marking the period between Christmas Day (December 25th) and Epiphany (January 6th), but it possesses original pagan roots.

A. Origin and Significance:

- **Pagan Roots:** In ancient Germanic and Celtic traditions, people believed that the sun stood still for 12 days during the middle of winter (winter solstice). These 12 days were a time of great celebration and rituals to mark the return of the sun.
- **Celebration:** No work was to be done during this time, and there were large communal celebrations with food, music, and sacrifices to the gods. The focus was on abundance and protection for the coming year.
- **A Time of Rest:** These 12 days were designated as a sacred period of festivity where labor was forbidden.

B. Integration into Christian Tradition:

- The early church reinterpreted this period: the 12 days now connect Christmas with **Epiphany**, the celebration of the visit of the Wise Men to Jesus.
- Although the meaning was changed, the practice of a 12-day period of celebration endures.

C. Biblical Perspective:

- The Bible provides no specific guideline for the number of days for Christmas. Therefore, Scripture warns against traditions that elevate human rituals above the Word of God:
    - **Matthew 15:8 (KJV):** *"This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me."*
    - **Jeremiah 10:2 (KJV):** *"Thus saith the Lord, Learn not the way of the heathen..."*

2.1.6. The Christmas Wreath

The Christmas Wreath is a traditional decoration often hung on doors or walls during the season. Although viewed today as a Christian symbol, it has pagan origins.

A. Origin and Significance:

- **Pagan Roots:** The circular shape of the wreath represents the **solar wheel** and the eternal cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. It was particularly significant during the winter solstice when the return of the sun was celebrated.
- **Symbolism:**
    - The circle symbolized the annual cycle of the seasons and the continuity of life.
    - Crowns or decorative elements on the wreath were sometimes used to "invoke" the return of the sun and the blessing of the gods.

B. Integration into Christian Tradition:

- The early church did not forbid the practice but transformed its meaning: the wreath became a Christian symbol representing eternal life and everlasting life in Christ.
- Today, it is seen as a decoration celebrating Christmas and indicating the coming of Christ.

C. Biblical Perspective:

- The Bible warns against the use of symbols or rituals that do not have God's Word as their foundation:
    - **Jeremiah 10:2 (KJV):** *"Thus saith the Lord, Learn not the way of the heathen, for the customs of the people are vain..."*
    - **Exodus 20:3 (KJV):** *"Thou shalt have no other gods before me."*

2.1.7. Christmas Cake (Fruitcake and Mince Pies)

The Christmas cake, also known as **Mince Pie** or **Fruitcake**, is a traditional delicacy enjoyed during the season. Although viewed today as a Christian custom, it possesses pagan origins. Those rich cakes filled with dried fruits and spices were originally more than just treats.

A. Origin and Significance:

- **Pagan Roots:**
    - In ancient times, fruits and seeds were seen as symbols of the harvest and abundance.
    - Cakes containing dried fruits and spices were baked to celebrate the spirit of the harvest and to ensure abundance for the coming year.
- **Symbolism of Spices:** Cinnamon, ginger, and cloves were scarce and expensive; they were used symbolically to conquer the cold of winter and bring warmth.
- **Mince Pie Shape:** Originally, mince pies were oval-shaped, resembling either a **manger** or a **coffin**—a mixture of celebrating life and marking the end of the year.

B. Integration into Christian Tradition:

- The church did not forbid the practice but transformed its meaning: the cake is now a symbolic festive cake for Christmas, sometimes focusing on the manger of Jesus' birth.
- However, many of the ritualistic or "magical" meanings of the old pagan cakes have been quietly retained in tradition.

C. Biblical Perspective: The Bible warns against the use of rituals or symbols that carry spiritual significance outside of God's Word:

- **Matthew 15:8 (KJV):** *"This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me."*
- **Jeremiah 10:2 (KJV):** *"Thus saith the Lord, Learn not the way of the heathen, for the customs of the people are vain..."*

D. The Tradition of Rich Fruitcakes The tradition of rich fruitcakes during winter festivals has both practical and symbolic origins:

- **Roman Satura:** The Romans created a mixture of barley, pomegranate seeds, pine nuts, and raisins bound together with sour wine. This was a method of preserving food for the winter.
- **Symbolism of Abundance:** In the Middle Ages, the church adopted these rich cakes. The use of expensive spices from the East and dried fruits became a symbol of the gifts brought by the Wise Men.
- **Solstice Tradition:** In pagan winter festivals, rich foods were consumed to "bribe" the sun to return and to demonstrate that there were enough provisions to survive the winter.

2.1.8. The Christmas Pig (Ham)

In South Africa and many other countries, a large glazed ham or a pork roast is the centerpiece of the festive table. The Christmas Pig (Christmas ham or roast pork) is a tradition that holds a central place today, yet it has clear pagan roots, particularly in Norse and Germanic cultures.

A. Origin and Significance: The Norse Yule

In the ancient Scandinavian world, the pig was a sacred animal associated with the god **Freyr**, the deity of:

- Fertility
- Prosperity
- The sun and good harvests

During **Yule** (the winter solstice), a boar was sacrificed to invoke Freyr's blessing for the coming year.

B. The Sónargöltr (Sun-Boar)

The sacrificial animal was known as the *Sónargöltr*:

- People would place their hands on the bristles of the boar.
- They made oaths and solemn vows for the new year.
- **Note:** This is the historical origin of **New Year's Resolutions**.

After the ritual, the boar was slaughtered and consumed in a communal sacred meal to:

- Ensure the return of the sun.
- Obtain fertility and prosperity for the land.

C. Transition to Christian Custom

With the Christianization of Europe:

- The ritual significance was not entirely eradicated.
- The pig simply became a festive meal.
- The symbolic origin was mostly forgotten by the masses.

Thus, the "Christmas Ham" became part of a "Christian" festival, even though the practice is not Biblically prescribed.

D. Biblical Perspective

The Bible repeatedly warns against blending the worship of God with heathen customs:

- **2 Kings 17:33 (KJV):** *"They feared the Lord, and served their own gods..."*
- **Jeremiah 10:2 (KJV):** *"Thus saith the Lord, Learn not the way of the heathen..."*
- **2 Corinthians 6:14 (KJV):** *"...and what communion hath light with darkness?"*

E. Theological Significance Today

The core question is not whether a person eats pork (Romans 14), but rather:

1. Where does the tradition originate?
2. What spiritual weight does it carry?

3. Has it become mere culture, or does it still carry a symbolic heritage?

The Christmas Pig is a clear example of the evolution: **Pagan Sacrifice → Cultural Ritual → "Innocent Tradition."**

2.1.9. The "Wassail" or Christmas Punch (Trifle and Drinks)

The **“Wassail”** (also spelled Wasail) is a very old Germanic-Anglo-Saxon winter ritual that later became part of Christmas customs in England and Northern Europe. It had nothing originally to do with Christianity but was a pagan fertility and protection ritual.

A. Meaning of the Word

The word *Wassail* indicates that it was a drinking and festive ritual, originating from the Old English greeting:

- **“Wæs hæil”**: “Be healthy,” or “May it go well with you.”
- **“Drinc hæil”**: “Drink and be healthy.”

B. Original Pagan Purpose

1. Fertility of Trees and Harvests Wassail was especially connected to apple orchards:

- People moved from tree to tree.
- A warm drink (wine, beer, or cider) was:
    - Poured onto the roots.
    - Splashed against the trunk.
- Pieces of bread or cake were hung on the branches. **The goal was to:**
- Drive away evil spirits.
- “Wake up” the trees.
- Ensure a good harvest in the spring.

2. The Drink Itself The Wassail drink was a ritual beverage, not merely entertainment:

- Warm beer or cider.
- Mixed with spices.
- Sometimes contained egg, honey, or cream.

3. Song and Noise People sang, shouted, and sometimes beat on pots with the intention of frightening away evil spirits and influencing the forces of nature. From this practice, **carolling** (singing from house to house) evolved.

C. Transition to Christmas

When the church Christianized Europe, the magical significance faded, but the form remained.

- The ritual was not abolished.

- It was repackaged as:
    - Singing Christmas carols.
    - Warm Christmas drinks.
    - House-to-house visits.

D. Modern Forms Today

Wassail lives on today, often without the participants being aware of its origins, as:

- Christmas punch.
- Mulled wine (Glühwein).
- Eggnog.
- Trifle and similar desserts.
- Carolling from door to door.

E. Biblical Perspective

The Bible clearly links drinking and fertility rituals to idolatry:

- **Exodus 32:6 (KJV):** *"...and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play."*
- **Hosea 4:12 (KJV):** *"My people ask counsel at their stocks, and their staff declareth unto them..."*
- **Jeremiah 10:2 (KJV):** *"Thus saith the Lord, Learn not the way of the heathen..."*

2.1.10. Santa Claus (Sinterklaas / Father Christmas)

The figure of Santa Claus is a blend of the historical Saint Nicholas and the Norse god **Odin**.

- **Odin's Wild Hunt:** During the time of **Yule** (winter solstice), Odin rode through the sky on his eight-legged horse, **Sleipnir**.
- **Sacrifice and Reward:** Children would fill their boots with straw and carrots for the horse, and in return, Odin would leave gifts or treats.
- **Christianization:** The church later transformed Odin's "Wild Hunt" into the story of Saint Nicholas to Christianize the pagan population, but the supernatural (pagan) elements remained.

2.1.11. The Concept of "Lent"

The concept of "Lent" refers to a 40-day preparation period before Easter. It is vital to understand that its form, calendar, and practices do not stem from a direct Biblical command but primarily from church tradition and early cultural influences.

A. Meaning of the Word "Lent"

- The word *Lent* comes from the Old English word *lencten*, which simply means **"spring"**—the season when days begin to lengthen.
- **Note:** It did not originally refer to fasting, repentance, or the suffering of Jesus, but to a natural season.

B. How Lent Originated

1. Not a Biblical Institution:

- There is **no commandment** or instruction from Jesus.
- There is **no apostolic mandate**.
- There is **no example** in the book of Acts of an annual 40-day fast before Easter.
- While Jesus fasted for 40 days (**Matthew 4:2**), He did not establish a recurring ritual, nor did He command anyone to imitate it annually.

2. Ecclesiastical Development (3rd–4th Century): This indicates a man-made liturgical calendar rather than a Biblical one. Lent developed slowly:

- It began as 1–2 days of fasting.
- It later expanded to a week.
- Eventually, it was fixed at 40 days (excluding Sundays).

C. Pagan Similarities

These rituals existed long before Christianity. **1. Spring Cleansing Rituals:** In many ancient cultures, these included:

- Fasting and avoiding certain foods.
- Practicing sexual abstinence.
- **Purpose:** To "purify" the body, prepare the soil for planting, and increase fertility.

2. Connection with Fertility Goddesses: The timing made cultural "sense," but it is theologically problematic. Lent coincides with:

- Festivals for **Eostre / Ishtar / Astarte**.
- Symbols of new life, eggs, hares, and light.

D. Practical Observations of Lent

During Lent, people "give something up" (meat, sugar, pleasure) as a form of self-mortification or spiritual cleansing. This can easily devolve into **works-righteousness** or ritualistic piety.

E. Biblical Warnings

Against man-made fasting and rituals:

- **Colossians 2:20–23 (KJV):** *"...why... are ye subject to ordinances... Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh?"*

- **Matthew 6:16 (KJV):** *"Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance..."*

True repentance is not seasonal:

- **Joel 2:13 (KJV):** *"And rend your heart, and not your garments..."*
- **John 4:24 (KJV):** *"God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."*

2.1.12. The Term "Hell" (The Norse Goddess Hel)

The term “Hell” has a linguistic and cultural history that is often confused with the Biblical concept of judgment. It is essential to recognize that the word itself is not originally Biblical.

A. Origin of the Word “Hell”

1. The Norse Goddess Hel In Norse (Germanic) mythology, **Hel** was:

- The goddess of the underworld.
- The ruler of **Helheim**, a realm for those who:
  - Did not die heroically in battle.
  - Did not enter Valhalla.
- The name *Hel* literally means: **“to cover”** or **“hidden.”**

Helheim was:

- Not necessarily a place of active punishment or fire.
- A cold, shadowy, and misty realm of the dead.
- A place of separation and passivity.

2. How “Hell” Entered the Bible When Germanic languages (Old English, Old Norse) began translating the Bible:

- Translators used their own mythological word, “Hel/Hell.”
- They applied this single word to represent several distinct Biblical concepts.
- This caused various Biblical truths to merge into one singular, confusing concept.

B. The Original Biblical Terms

1. Sheol (Hebrew):

- **Meaning:** The grave, the realm of the dead.
- A general place for all who die.
- Contains no description of fire or torture. (**Ecclesiastes 9:10**)

2. Hades (Greek):

- The New Testament equivalent of Sheol.

- A temporary state of the dead. (**Acts 2:27**)

3. Gehenna:

- **A physical location:** The Valley of Hinnom outside Jerusalem.
- Used as a metaphor for final judgment.
- Associated with fire. (**Matthew 10:28**)

4. The Lake of Fire:

- Final judgment.
- Not Hades, but occurring after the resurrection. (**Revelation 20:14–15**)

C. The Problem with the Word "Hell"

When everything is translated as "Hell":

- Sheol, Hades, Gehenna, and the Lake of Fire are blended together.
- This results in **confusion, unbiblical doctrines,** and an **emotional theology of fear.**
- The Norse concept of *Hel* has unconsciously influenced the imagery and imagination of later Christian thought.

D. Biblical Warning Against Blending

- **Colossians 2:8 (KJV):** *"Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men..."*
- **Mark 7:8 (KJV):** *"For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men..."*

2.1.13. Hot Cross Buns (The Pagan Cross, Not Christian)

Long before the time of Christ, various ancient civilizations were already baking special cakes or breads marked with crosses:

- **The Four Seasons:** For the Ancient Greeks and Romans, the cross on the bread represented the four seasons or the four phases of the moon. It was not a symbol of suffering, but of the **"Wheel of Life"** and natural cycles.
- **The Goddess Eostre:** The Saxons (early Germanic tribes) baked these buns in honor of Eostre, the goddess of light and spring. The cross on the bun represented the **horns of an ox**, which was symbolically sacrificed to her to invoke fertility and a good harvest.

A. The Biblical Warning (Jeremiah)

In the Bible, the prophet Jeremiah rebukes the people for a practice that sounds strikingly similar:

- **Jeremiah 7:18 (KJV):** *"...and the women knead their dough, to make cakes to the queen of heaven..."*
- Many researchers believe these "cakes" offered to fertility goddesses like Ishtar or Astarte were the precursors to the modern hot cross bun.

B. How the Church "Baptized" It

As with many other customs, the early church could not persuade the masses to stop baking these spiced buns in the spring.

- Instead of banning it, the church changed the meaning.
- The cross now represents the Crucifixion, and the spices (such as cinnamon and cloves) symbolize the spices used to embalm the body of Jesus.

C. Superstitions and Magical Powers

In the Middle Ages, people believed that buns baked on Good Friday possessed supernatural powers:

- **Never Mouldy:** It was believed they would stay fresh all year.
- **Protection against Fire:** Buns were hung from kitchen ceilings to protect the house from fire and evil spirits.
- **Medicine:** Grated bun mixed with water was used as a "miracle cure" for the sick.
- **Sailors:** Buns were taken to sea to prevent shipwrecks.

D. An Illegal Pastry?

The practice was so riddled with superstition that in 1592, Queen Elizabeth I issued a decree banning the sale of these buns except on Good Friday, Christmas, and for funerals. This was because people were using them as **talismans** (charms), which was considered idolatry. However, people loved them so much they began baking them secretly in their homes—the origin of the "home-baked" tradition.

2.1.14. "Shooting Crackers" (Fireworks and Crackers)

The tradition of fireworks and crackers spans thousands of years. While used for celebration today, the original purpose was deeply superstitious.

A. Ancient China (The Origin)

The use of crackers began over 2,000 years ago in China.

- **Natural Crackers:** Before gunpowder, people threw fresh bamboo into fires. The air pockets inside expanded and burst with a loud bang.
- **Evil Spirits:** The Chinese believed the loud noise would drive away evil spirits (like the monster *Nian*). This was done during the Chinese New Year to ensure luck.
- **Gunpowder:** Around 600–900 AD, alchemists invented gunpowder and placed it in bamboo tubes to create even larger explosions.

B. Guy Fawkes (The British Influence)

In South Africa, the tradition of shooting crackers on the 5th of November stems directly from British history.

- **The Gunpowder Plot (1605):** Guy Fawkes and his co-conspirators tried to blow up the Houses of Parliament. The plot failed, and fireworks were used to celebrate the King's safety, symbolizing the gunpowder that never ignited.

C. Diwali (The Indian Tradition)

The "Festival of Lights" also plays a role, especially in countries with large Indian communities.

- **Victory over Darkness:** Crackers are fired to celebrate the victory of light over darkness and good over evil. It is believed the noise makes the gods aware of the people's joy on earth.

D. Why on New Year's Eve?

The use of fireworks on New Year's Eve is a combination of these influences, rooted in:

1. **Driving out the "Old Year":** The noise "scares away" the misfortunes of the past year.
2. **Welcoming the "New Year":** It serves as a joyful announcement of a new beginning.

2.2. The Gingerbread Man

In ancient cultures, particularly within Roman and later Germanic contexts, food served not only for nutrition but also fulfilled a ritualistic and symbolic function. Archaeological and literary sources indicate that cookies and breads in the form of humans or animals were sometimes used as **symbolic substitutes** within sacrificial contexts, especially when actual animal sacrifices were not practical or affordable.

This practice did not necessarily replace blood sacrifices in formal temple rituals but functioned rather as domestic or seasonal symbolic acts. The shape of the pastry represented the life, fertility, or blessing expected from the deity. The consumption or offering of such "figurine food" carried a representative meaning—not because the dough itself was divine, but because it functioned as a sign within a worldview where deities could be influenced through visible actions.

A. Brief Theological Reflection

These practices stand in sharp contrast to Biblical revelation, where God does not accept substitute symbolic offerings born of human ingenuity, but provides the sacrifice Himself:

- **Hebrews 10:4 (KJV):** *"For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins."*
- **John 1:29 (KJV):** *"Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."*

2.3. Easter (Eostre)

In **Acts 12:4**, the King James Version uses the word "Easter" to translate the Greek word *pascha*. However, *pascha* is derived from the Hebrew *Pesach* (Passover). In the original Greek text, the term "Easter" as a holiday did not exist.

When the KJV was translated in 1611, "Easter" was already the standard English word for the resurrection festival, heavily influenced by the ecclesiastical traditions of the Church of England. Translators used terms established in common parlance, even if technical accuracy (distinguishing between the Jewish Passover and the Christian Easter) was sometimes blurred.

The name "Easter" in English (and "Ostern" in German) betrays its origins:

- **Eostre:** The name of the Germanic goddess of spring and fertility.
- **Hares and Eggs:** Both are ancient symbols of fertility and new life used long before Christianity to celebrate the arrival of spring.
- **Spring Festivals:** The idea of "new life" after winter is universal in pagan cultures.

A. The Problem with Timing

The Greek text refers to the period of the Passover.

- **Acts 12:3** notes: *"Then were the days of unleavened bread."* * Since the text states it was already the days of unleavened bread, the actual Passover meal (14 Nisan) had likely already occurred.

While the church celebrates Easter as the resurrection of Christ, the name and symbols remain strongly pagan:

2.3.1. The Easter Egg

Long before Christianity, the egg was a powerful symbol in pagan cultures across the world (such as the Egyptians, Persians, and Romans).

- **The "World Egg":** Many ancient creation myths begin with a cosmic egg from which the universe was born.
- **Spring Festival:** Because eggs contain new life, they were the central symbol of spring festivals (such as those for the goddess **Eostre**), celebrating the rebirth of nature after winter.

- **Christian Adaptation:** The early church began using the egg as a metaphor for the tomb of Jesus. The hard shell represents the sealed tomb, and the cracking of the egg symbolizes Jesus rising from the dead.
- **Coloring Eggs:** Ancient Mesopotamians dyed eggs thousands of years ago. The church later attempted to "Christianize" this by claiming the red color represents the blood of Christ, yet the practice itself originates from the idolatry of fertility rituals.

2.3.2. The Easter Bunny

In original German folklore, the *Oschter Haws* (Easter Hare) judged whether children were "good or naughty" before laying eggs in their "nests."

- **The Superstition:** Here, God's judgment is replaced by a reward system based on material things (candy or gifts).

A. Omniscience

For a child, Santa Claus (and the Easter Bunny) is all-knowing:

- They "know" what you do when you are alone.
- They "see" you when you are sleeping.
- In pagan terms, this is similar to the idea of **household spirits** or *lares* (Roman) that watch over the inhabitants of a home. By attributing this characteristic to Santa or the Bunny, they become "household gods" that usurp God's role as the One who knows the hearts of men.
- *Santa Claus: "He's making a list and checking it twice; gonna find out who's naughty or nice."*

B. Omnipresence

The ability to reach every child on the planet in a single night is a direct imitation of God's ability to be everywhere simultaneously.

- Santa does this by manipulating time and space (the sleigh).
- The Easter Bunny does this by moving invisibly and lightning-fast.
- These "magical" abilities elevate these figures to a supernatural status that competes with the concept of an Almighty God.

C. The Displacement of Worship

In the modern context of the Christian church, a shift occurs:

- **Focus Shift:** The focus moves from spiritual significance (the Birth or the Resurrection) to the anticipation of a visit by a mythical being.
- **Rituals:** Leaving "offerings" for Santa (milk and cookies) or building nests for the Easter Bunny strongly resembles ancient pagan **votive offerings**—small gifts left for spirits or gods to win their favor.

D. Santa's Roots in Odin (Pagan)

Looking at Santa's origins, one sees the Norse god **Odin**.

- During **Yule** (winter solstice), Odin rode through the sky on his eight-legged horse, *Sleipnir*.
- Children would fill their boots with straw and carrots for the horse, and in return, Odin would leave gifts or treats.
- The church later transformed Odin's "Wild Hunt" into the story of Saint Nicholas to convert the pagan population, but the supernatural elements remained.

2.3.3. The Origin of "Hide and Seek" (Easter Egg Hunts)

There are two main streams from which this custom flows—one superstitious/pagan and one arising later from the Protestant Reformation:

A. The Superstitious/Fable Origin (Germany):

- The custom largely stems from German folklore involving the *Oschter Haws*.
- According to legend, this hare laid colored eggs for children who were "good."
- Children built "nests" in the garden (often using hats or baskets), and the hare would leave the eggs there.
- The "search" arose because the hare would "hide" the eggs in the garden or grass, and children had to prove they were observant enough to find the gifts.

B. The Ecclesiastical/Symbolic Origin (Martin Luther):

- There are historical indications that the reformer **Martin Luther** (16th century) organized egg hunts for his congregation.
- **The "Women at the Tomb":** In this tradition, the men hid the eggs, and the women and children had to find them.
- **The Meaning:** The search was a symbolic reenactment of the Biblical account where the women (like Mary Magdalene) went to the tomb to seek Jesus' body, only to find the tomb empty and that He was alive. Finding the egg was thus a celebration of the discovery of the Resurrection.

2.3.4. Why is it still followed in the Church today?

Today, most churches view it as innocent fun for children, but the underlying reasons it became "normal" include:

- **The End of the Fast (Lent):** In the Middle Ages, eating eggs was forbidden during the 40 days of Lent. By Easter Sunday, there was an abundance of eggs. Decorating and searching for them was a way to celebrate the end of the fast with great joy.

- **Convenient Symbolism:** The church found it easier to use an existing cultural symbol (the egg) to explain a complex theological concept (the Resurrection) to uneducated people or children.

2.4. Other Common Customs and Symbols

There are also smaller, daily things we do without realizing their origins:

- **Days of the Week:** Almost all the days in English are named after Norse or Roman gods (e.g., **Thursday** is Thor's Day, **Friday** is Frigg's Day, **Saturday** is Saturn's Day).
- **Wedding Customs:** Wearing a **veil** (to trick evil spirits) and the giving of **rings** (a symbol of the sun and infinity) have roots in ancient Roman and pagan traditions.
- **Birthday Candles:** The ancient Greeks placed candles on cakes to honor the goddess Artemis; the smoke was believed to carry prayers to the gods.

2.4.1. Halloween (Samhain)

Halloween originates from the Celtic festival of **Samhain** (pronounced *Sow-in*).

- **The Veil:** The Celts believed that the boundary between the world of the living and the dead was thinnest on this night.
- **Costumes:** People wore masks and skins to disguise themselves so that evil spirits would not recognize or bother them.
- **Jack-o'-lanterns:** Originally, **turnips** (not pumpkins) were hollowed out to carry coals to ward off evil spirits.

2.4.2. Valentine’s Day (Lupercalia)

Although named after St. Valentine, its roots lie in the Roman festival of **Lupercalia** (February 13–15).

- This was a fertility festival involving rituals to promote health and fertility, often including the drawing of lots for partners.

2.4.3. Birthday Cakes and Candles

This custom has its roots in ancient Greek culture and was later developed further by the Germans.

- **The Greek Connection:** Ancient Greeks baked round cakes as an offering to **Artemis**, goddess of the moon. The round shape symbolized the moon. To make the cake "shine" like the moon, they placed candles on it.
- **The Smoke:** It was believed that the smoke from the candles would carry prayers and wishes to the gods in heaven—this is the origin of "making a wish."
- **Children’s Festivals (*Kindergerecht*):** In 15th-century Germany, the modern birthday party was born. They believed children were especially vulnerable to evil

spirits on their birthdays. The cake and candles (one for each year plus one for the "light of life") were intended to protect the child.

2.4.4. Trifle

While the trifle itself is not a direct pagan ritual, it is an evolution of ancient European festive food:

- **Evolution of "Fools":** The modern trifle (layers of cake, custard, and fruit) developed in England from the 16th-century "Fruit Fool."
- **Sensory Delight:** In many ancient cultures, the use of cream and dairy during festivals was a symbol of fertility and the favor of nature spirits (such as Celtic festivals where milk and butter were vital).
- **The Name:** The word "trifle" comes from the Old French word *trufle*, meaning something of little value or something made "just for pleasure." It was the ideal way to use up leftover cake and alcohol after a great feast.

2.4.5. Thanksgiving

This serves as an example of how "beautiful" traditions can be absorbed and distorted by the world.

A. The Historical Version (The Pilgrims) In 1621, the Pilgrims (English Puritans who fled to America for religious freedom) held a harvest festival in Plymouth, Massachusetts.

- **The Story:** After a terrible first winter where half of them died, the local Wampanoag Indians taught them how to plant corn and catch fish.
- **The Feast:** They held a three-day feast to thank God for the first good harvest. It was originally a sincere religious service of thanksgiving.

B. Ancient Pagan Roots (Harvest Festivals) Although the Pilgrims were Christians, the concept of a "harvest festival" is thousands of years old and comes from paganism:

- **The Greeks and Romans:** They held festivals for the goddesses of the harvest (**Demeter** and **Ceres**).
- **The Celts:** They celebrated **"Lammas,"** where they brought offerings to the sun-god for the first fruits of the soil.
- **The "Cornucopia" (Horn of Plenty):** This symbol is often seen at Thanksgiving. It comes directly from Greek mythology (the horn of the goat Amalthea).

C. The Modern American-Political Origin Thanksgiving did not immediately become a national holiday.

- **Abraham Lincoln:** In 1863, during the American Civil War, he proclaimed Thanksgiving as a national day to unite a divided nation by focusing on common gratitude.

D. "Food for Thought"

- **From Gratitude to Greed:** Thanksgiving is now the day before **Black Friday**. The irony is stark: On Thursday, people say they are grateful for what they have, and on Friday, they fight in stores to get more. This shows how the world can convert a spiritual day of gratitude into a pagan feast of material greed within 24 hours.
- **The "Turkey Ritual":** For many, Thanksgiving is no longer about God, but about the ritual of the food. If the turkey isn't right, the day is "ruined." This becomes a form of idolatry where the feast becomes more important than the **Provider** of the food.

Hierdie afdeling sluit die lys van simbole kragtig af. Dit wys dat die "Paganisme" nie net in die verlede is nie, maar dat dit daagliks deur gierigheid en tradisie hernu word.

2.4.6. Charismatic Witchcraft

"Charismatic Witchcraft" is a term used to describe when individuals within the church use spiritual tools (such as prayer or prophecy) to **manipulate, control, or dominate** others.

This is not about people in black hats with cauldrons; it is about a **spirit of control** that usurps the place of the Holy Spirit. Here is how it fits into your "Food for Thought" research:

A. Manipulation through "Prophecy"

This is the most common form. Someone says: *"The Lord told me you must do this or that"* (usually something that benefits the "prophet," such as giving money or making a specific decision).

- **Why it is "witchcraft":** The core of witchcraft is bending the will of another person through supernatural means. When "God's voice" is used to force someone to act against their own conviction or will, it is **spiritual tyranny**.

B. Prayer as a Weapon (Control Prayers)

This occurs when people do not pray *for* someone, but *against* them under the guise of prayer.

- **Example:** *"Lord, break this person's resistance so that he will accept my plans,"* or the woman in your story praying for "charring" or fire upon others.
- **The Root:** This is nothing more than a **curse** in a Christian coat. You are attempting to impose your will on another by using "spiritual power."

C. Psychological Domination

Some leaders use hypnotic techniques, repetitive chanting, and emotionally intense music to induce a "trance" state where followers can no longer think critically.

- The moment a person's **free will** (given by God) is bypassed through peer pressure or psychological manipulation, you have moved away from the Gospel and toward the occult.

D. The Contrast: The Holy Spirit vs. Control

The Holy Spirit	Charismatic Witchcraft
Fruit: Self-control (Galatians 5:23)	**Fruit:** Loss of control / Hysteria
Method: Conviction of sin and truth	**Method:** Fear, threats, and guilt
Goal: To glorify Christ	**Goal:** To serve the "man of God" or the institution

E. Why it causes Apostasy

People who have been victims of this type of "witchcraft" often feel **spiritually violated**.

- When they realize they were manipulated with "pious words," they lose all trust in the church.
- They flee—often to alternative spiritualities like Buddhism, as seen in your story—because they are seeking safety from the **emotional violence** they experienced in the name of God.

2.4.7. Manifestation

A. Correct Application: The Manifestation of the Spirit (Biblical)

- **The Revelation of the Spirit: 1 Corinthians 12:7 (KJV)** states: *"But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal."*
    - **The Source:** Here, the Holy Spirit chooses to reveal Himself through a person (e.g., through a word of wisdom or healing).
    - **The Direction:** It is from **Top to Bottom**. Man is merely the channel. It does not happen because man "manipulated the universe," but because God chose to make His power visible.
- **Faith as "Evidence" of things unseen:**
    - **Hebrews 11:1 (KJV)** says: *"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."*
    - When you pray for rain and begin cleaning out your dams, you are performing an action that shows the manifestation of your faith. This is not "magic"; it is **obedience**. You act as if God's promise is already true because you trust Him, not because you think your thoughts control the clouds.

B. Incorrect Application: "Thought Magic"

Modern manifestation is often nothing more than "thought magic." Here is why it is dangerous:

- **Man becomes "God":** The core of modern manifestation (as seen in *The Secret* or the "Law of Attraction") is that your thoughts have the power to create reality.
    - **The Lie:** If you "believe" or "visualize" it hard enough, the universe *must* give it to you.
    - **The Danger:** This knocks God off His throne and puts man there. You no longer ask God, *"Thy will be done"*; you command the universe, *"My will be done."* This is the exact sin of Lucifer—wanting to be like God.
- **"Positive Thinking" as a Magic Formula:** When manifestation enters the church (often as "Word of Faith" or "Positive Confession" teachings), it becomes a form of Christian witchcraft.
    - **The Misapplication:** People believe that if they speak the "right words," God is obligated to respond. This turns prayer into a technique instead of a relationship.
    - **The Fruit:** If the "manifestation" fails (e.g., someone is not healed), the person is blamed because their "confession" or "faith" wasn't right. This causes immense spiritual damage.
- **The "Universe" vs. The Creator:** Practitioners often speak of "The Universe" providing for them.
    - **The Pagan Root:** In paganism, people worship the creation instead of the Creator. The "Universe" has no will or morality; it is a created thing. Believing the universe "listens" to you is **animism** (the belief that nature has a spirit).
- **Self-Centered Greed:** Manifestation usually focuses on a new car, a bigger house, or more money.
    - **The Contrast:** Jesus teaches us to deny ourselves and take up our cross. Manifestation teaches us to satisfy ourselves and chase our dreams.
- **Visualization as an Occult Technique:** Many teachers instruct people to close their eyes and see the desired object as clearly as possible until it "manifests."
    - **The Danger:** In the occult, visualization is the primary method used to contact spirits and manipulate reality. The Bible says we walk by faith, not by sight (or imagined images).

2.4.8. "Name it, Claim it"

In the religious world, this is known as the **Prosperity Gospel** or the **Word of Faith** movement. It is the pinnacle of "Charismatic Witchcraft," turning the believer into a "little god" who thinks their words have the same creative power as God’s.

A. "See it" (Visualization)

- **The Deception:** This is an occult technique. You attempt to "create" an image in your mind that must then appear in the physical world.
- **The Danger:** It focuses on **matter** instead of the **Master**. Instead of keeping your eyes on Jesus, you keep your eyes on the "prize."

B. "Name it" (Positive Confession)

- **The Distortion:** Misusing **Proverbs 18:21**, they believe that saying you are sick "speaks" sickness into existence, while saying you are rich "creates" wealth.
- **The Reality:** This is **metaphysical witchcraft**. It denies the reality of the Fall and the fact that we live in a broken world where bad things happen even to righteous people (consider Job).

C. "Claim it"

- **The Danger:** You no longer act as a humble servant saying, *"If it be Thy will,"* but as a master making demands. This turns God into a "Divine Waiter" who must deliver your order because you "claimed" it.

D. Why does this drive people away?

- **Psychological Trauma:** When someone "claims" a child's healing and the child dies, they are told, *"You didn't believe hard enough."* This utterly destroys a person's faith.
- **Intellectual Dishonesty:** People see leaders getting rich from this teaching while the members remain poor. It looks like—and is—a "Pyramid Scheme."
- **The Shift to Buddhism/Atheism:** When "Name it, Claim it" fails, people think the Bible is a lie. They don't realize it wasn't the Bible that failed, but a **pagan formula** sold to them in a Biblical wrapper.

2.5. Wedding Customs

Wedding traditions are often so deeply ingrained in our culture that we seldom question why we practice them. Most of these customs have fascinating (and sometimes superstitious) roots that stretch back thousands of years.

A. The Wedding Ring: Symbol of Eternal Love

The history of the wedding ring begins with the Ancient Egyptians. For them, the circle was a symbol of eternity, as it has no beginning and no end. The opening in the center represented a "gateway" to the unknown future. The circle is one of the most fundamental pagan symbols.

- **Binding:** In pagan rituals, a circle is drawn to contain energy or provide protection. The ring on the finger was a portable version of this—a "magical band" to bind the soul of the partner to yours.
- **Handfasting:** In Celtic paganism, rings were not always used; instead, the couple's hands were bound together with a rope or ribbon (this is where the phrase "tie the knot" comes from). It was a literal binding of their life forces.
- **Why the ring finger?** The tradition of wearing the ring on the fourth finger of the left hand comes from the Romans. They believed a vein in that finger ran directly to the heart, the so-called *Vena Amoris* (vein of love).
- **Payment:** In later centuries, the ring also served as a "dowry" or a token of financial security offered by the man to the woman's family.

The Church's Reaction: Although we consider it a core part of a Christian wedding today, the use of a ring has no Biblical mandate.

- **Pagan Roots:** The custom originates from ancient Egypt and Rome.
- **Integration:** The early church initially regarded it as "pagan," but by the 9th century, it became an official part of the ecclesiastical ceremony because it was viewed as a beautiful symbol of fidelity.

B. The Wedding Cake: From Bread to Crumbs

The throwing of rice or confetti and the eating of cake are both rooted in "sympathetic magic" (the idea that "like produces like").

- **Grains and Seeds:** In pagan times, wheat or seeds were thrown over the bride. Because seeds contain the germ of new life, this act was meant to plead with the fertility deities to make the bride "fruitful."
- **Barley Bread:** In Ancient Rome, it wasn't a cake but a simple barley bread. The groom would eat a piece and then break the remainder of the bread over the bride's head as a symbol of fertility and good luck.
- **Gathering Crumbs:** Guests would then scramble to pick up the crumbs to capture some of that "luck" for themselves.
- **Middle Ages:** In England, it was customary to pile small biscuits or scones in a large heap. If the couple could kiss over the pile without knocking it over, they were believed to have a prosperous life together.

C. Carrying the Bride over the Threshold

This tradition has two main origin stories, both rooted in the protection of the bride:

- **Evil Spirits:** In the Middle Ages, it was believed that evil spirits lurked at the threshold of a new home. If the bride were to stumble while entering, it would bring misfortune to the marriage. To be safe, the groom carried her across.
- **Reluctance:** Another theory (from Roman times) suggests it was considered unseemly for a bride to appear too eager to leave her parents' house. By carrying her, the groom symbolically "forced" her entry, protecting her reputation as a modest woman.

D. The Bridal Veil: Disguise against Evil

Today, the veil is a beautiful accessory, but its origin is quite mysterious:

- **Protection against the "Evil Eye":** In Roman and Greek times, it was believed that the bride was highly vulnerable to evil spirits and envy on her wedding day. She was covered with a veil to disguise her so that spirits could not identify or curse her.
- **Arranged Marriages:** In the era of arranged marriages, there was a practical (and slightly deceptive) reason. The veil covered the bride's face so the groom couldn't see what she looked like until the ceremony was finalized, preventing him from "getting a fright" and running away before they were legally wed!

E. The Garter Toss: A Rescue for the Bride

This tradition seems like fun today, but in the Middle Ages, it was a way to physically protect the bride:

- **A Piece of the Dress:** In those years, it was believed that owning a piece of the bride's dress brought incredible luck. After the ceremony, guests would literally pull and tear at the bride to get a scrap of fabric.
- **The Escape:** To prevent the bride's dress from being torn to shreds (and to prevent her from being injured), the groom began throwing another item to satisfy the crowd. The garter was an easy item to remove and toss so the couple could escape to the honeymoon suite.
- **Proof of Marriage:** In some cultures, the garter also served as proof to the witnesses that the marriage would be "consummated."

F. Something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue...

This well-known rhyme originated in the Victorian era in England, and each item served a specific superstitious or symbolic purpose:

- **Old:** Represents the bond with the bride's family and her past.
- **New:** Symbolizes hope for the future and the new chapter beginning.
- **Borrowed:** Usually something from a woman who is already happily married, so that her "good luck" might rub off on the new bride.
- **Blue:** In ancient times, blue was the color of fidelity, purity, and loyalty (often associated with the Virgin Mary).
- **A Sixpence in her shoe:** The original rhyme ends with *"and a silver sixpence in her shoe,"* intended to ensure financial prosperity for the couple.

G. The Veil and Bridesmaids: Deceiving Spirits

In many early pagan cultures, it was believed that the transition from one life phase to another (like getting married) was a time when a person was spiritually "open" and vulnerable.

- **The Veil:** This was not initially for decoration but acted as a protective shield. The Romans often used flame-colored veils (*flammeum*) to make the bride look like fire, which was intended to scare off evil spirits or hide her face so they couldn't find her.
- **Bridesmaids:** The reason bridesmaids traditionally wore similar clothing to the bride was to act as decoys. The idea was to confuse evil spirits (or jealous suitors) so they wouldn't know which woman was the real bride.

H. The Two Famous Marches

When we speak of the "Wedding March," we usually refer to two specific 19th-century pieces of music:

- **The Processional (Bridal Chorus):** Written by **Richard Wagner** (1848). This is the famous "Here Comes the Bride."
- **The Recessional (Wedding March):** Written by **Felix Mendelssohn** (1842). Usually played festively as the couple leaves the church.

I. Sound as a "Weapon Shield" (The Superstition)

Long before these specific compositions existed, music at a wedding was not just for atmosphere, but for protection.

- **Warding off spirits:** In ancient times and early pagan Europe, it was believed that evil spirits were particularly active during rites of passage.
- **Noise Rituals:** To drive these spirits away, a great noise had to be made. This is the origin of ringing church bells, blowing trumpets, and even the tradition of tying cans behind the wedding car.
- **Musical Defense:** The wedding march is essentially the formal, musical version of this "protective noise," meant to create a safe path for the bride to the altar.

J. The Pagan Connotations of Wagner

It is ironic that Wagner's "Bridal Chorus" is so common in churches, as many denominations once tried to ban it due to its origins:

- **Opera Background:** The music comes from Wagner's opera *Lohengrin*. In the story, the marriage between Lohengrin and Elsa is a total disaster that ends in tragedy.
- **Pagan Themes:** Wagner was famous for his interest in Germanic paganism and myths. Many strict Christian churches considered the music "unholy" because it wasn't written for God, but for a theatrical piece about heathen legends.

K. Why is it "Normal" Today? (The Victorian Influence)

The reason this music became the "standard" for weddings has everything to do with **Princess Victoria** (the eldest daughter of Queen Victoria).

- In 1858, she married Prince Frederick of Prussia. She was a great fan of both Wagner and Mendelssohn and chose to use their music.
- Because the Royal Family was seen as the pinnacle of morality and style, the rest of the Western world (and the churches) followed this choice blindly, as if it were a divine command.

L. The Altar: A Place of Sacrifice

Even the destination—the **altar**—carries heavy symbolism.

- In ancient pagan cultures, the altar was literally the site of blood sacrifices to the gods.
- By leading the bride to the altar with music, the symbolism of "sacrifice" was maintained—she is "offered" or handed over by her father to a new family to ensure the lineage, a ritual deeply rooted in ancient fertility cults.

2.6. Rituals and Customs Inside and Outside the Church

2.6.1. The Use of Incense and Candles

In high-liturgical churches (such as Anglican or Catholic churches), incense and candles are common features.

- **Pagan Roots:** Roman officials were often accompanied by candles and incense as a sign of their status and a symbol of divine protection.
- **Biblical Connection:** Churches often justify this by pointing to the Tabernacle in the Old Testament, where incense represented the prayers of the saints ascending to God.

2.6.2. The Fish Symbol

The fish symbol (also known as the **Ichthus**) is one of the oldest and most interesting symbols because it perfectly illustrates how Christianity took a common symbol and gave it a new, powerful meaning—but also how it has often become just another "empty logo" today.

A. Origin and Meaning

The word for "fish" in Greek is **ICHTHUS**. Early Christians (who suffered great persecution under the Romans) used this as an acronym or secret code. Each letter represented a confession of who Jesus is:

- **I** – Iota (*Iesous* - Jesus)
- **CH** – Chi (*Christos* - Christ)
- **TH** – Theta (*Theou* - of God)
- **U** – Upsilon (*Huios* - Son)
- **S** – Sigma (*Soter* - Savior) **The meaning:** *"Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior."*

B. The Secret Code

In the time of the early church, you could not simply declare yourself a Christian without risking death.

- If two strangers met, one would draw a half-circle (an arc) in the sand.
- If the other person was also a Christian, they would complete the arc to form the fish.
- It was a silent way of saying: *"I belong to the King."*

C. The Pagan Counterpart (The Shadow)

As with the circle and the cross, the fish had an older, pagan history before Christians adopted it:

- In ancient cultures (such as Mesopotamia and Egypt), the fish was linked to fertility goddesses (like Atargatis or **Dagon**, the fish-god of the Philistines).
- Some critics argue the fish is pagan because it resembles the **"Vesica Piscis,"** a shape used in occult geometry.

D. How It Fits In Today

The fish symbol today is the perfect example of the modernization and dilution of faith:

- **From Confession to Accessory:** In the early church, the fish was a sign you were prepared to die for. Today, it is a sticker on the back of a luxury car or a business card used to attract more clients (the "business model").
- **Hypocrisy on the Road:** Nothing irritates the world more than someone with a fish sticker on their car who drives aggressively, cuts people off, or uses foul language. The symbol says *"Jesus is Savior,"* but the behavior says *"I am the king of the road."*
- **"Logo-Christianity":** We wear the symbols (the fish, the cross), but we bear the fruits of the flesh. The symbol has become a screen behind which we hide.

2.6.3. Praying Hands

This is the well-known position where the palms are pressed together, often with the fingers pointing upward. In the art world, it was made famous by Albrecht Dürer's drawing, *"Praying Hands"* (1508).

In early Biblical times, people typically prayed with their hands raised (**the Orans position**). The habit of pressing palms together likely evolved from an ancient Roman custom of submission or a medieval gesture of loyalty.

A. The Roman "Vincire" (Binding)

In the ancient Roman world, this was the way a prisoner offered his hands to be bound or shackled with ropes (*vincire*).

- **The Prisoner:** The gesture indicated that you were conquered and carried no weapons.
- **Absolute Surrender:** It was a sign of total submission to the will of the victor.

B. The Feudal "Commendatio" (Submission)

During the Middle Ages, long before it was a common prayer posture, this was part of a political ritual:

- **The Vassal:** A subject (vassal) would press his palms together and place them between the hands of his lord or king.
- **Oath of Fealty:** It was an oath that said: *"I am now your man; my life and strength belong to you."*
- **The Church's Adoption:** The church took this gesture of feudal servitude and projected it onto God. This shifted the relationship from a personal connection to one of **"Master and Servant"** (aligning with the concept of man as a subject of a "Great Architect").

C. Departure from the Biblical Position

In the Bible (as well as in ancient Greek and Roman paganism), the standard way to pray was with open hands lifted toward heaven.

- The shift to "closed" or "pressed" hands only became common much later (around the 9th century).
- Some researchers believe the church promoted "closed" hands to make prayer appear more controlled and submissive, rather than the free, exuberant lifting of hands found in Scripture.

D. Buddhist and Hindu Origins (Anjali Mudra)

In Eastern traditions, this exact hand position has been used for thousands of years as the **"Namaste"** or **Anjali Mudra** gesture.

- It is believed to balance the two halves of the brain and the body's energy.
- While it looks "normal" to a modern Christian, it is one of the oldest mystical hand gestures in the history of idolatry.

2.6.4. The Etymological Debate: Amen vs. Amun

Many researchers of ancient religions point to the striking similarity between the Hebrew word *Amen* and the name of the Egyptian supreme deity, **Amun** (also spelled *Amen*).

- **Amun-Ra:** Amun was the "Hidden One," the king of the gods in Egypt. At the end of prayers or hymns in Egyptian temples, his name was shouted to confirm the prayer.
- **The Theory:** The theory suggests that during their 400-year stay in Egypt, the Israelites may have absorbed the sound and function of this "confirmation word." Although the Hebrew meaning shifted to "truth" or "so be it," its function as a ritualistic closing word remains identical to the invocation of the Egyptian deity.

A. "Stealing" God's Identity

In your collection of how God's attributes are hijacked, it is important to note how Amun was described:

- Amun was often called the **"Invisible God"** or the **"Self-created One."**
- By using a word that sounds identical to the name of a pagan supreme god, the line between the true God and the idolatry of the time was subtly blurred.

B. The "Amen" as a Talisman

In the modern church, the word has often taken on a superstitious character:

- People feel a prayer is not "finished" or "valid" unless the word is spoken.
- It functions almost like a **magic word** to ensure God's attention. This mirrors how pagan mantras work—repeating a specific sound to manipulate the supernatural.

C. Similarity to the Hindu "Om"

In the context of universal idolatry, there is a phonetic similarity between *Amen* and the Hindu/Buddhist **Aum (Om)**.

- Both are used as a universal confirmation of spiritual truth.
- This again demonstrates how "normal" church terms often have roots in a broader, ancient tradition of man attempting to gain power over the spiritual world through specific sounds.

2.6.5. The Laying on of Hands: Magical Energy Transfer

In the modern church, hands are laid on people for healing or to "impart" the Holy Spirit. While this is mentioned in the Bible, the manner in which it is handled today—as a type of "power transfer"—is often dangerously close to ancient occult practices.

- **Pagan Magic:** In ancient Greek and Egyptian medicinal rituals, it was believed that the priest or "shaman" was a physical conduit for fluid energy (*mana* or *prana*). By touching someone, he pumped his own "magical power" into the other person.
- **The "Electric" Experience:** In some modern charismatic churches, there is an immense emphasis on physical sensations (falling over or jerking) when hands are laid on. This corresponds precisely with the pagan practice of **Kundalini energy** or **"Shaktipat"** in Hinduism, where the guru touches the follower to awaken a supernatural experience.
- **Usurping God's Sovereignty:** This practice "steals" God's role. Instead of God choosing to bless someone according to His own will, the human (the minister) becomes the "controller" of the power. The hands become instruments of human will, which is a form of man-worship or sorcery.

The Warning: "Lay Hands Suddenly on No Man"

The specific warning in **1 Timothy 5:22** (*"Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins..."*) is often misunderstood or ignored, but it is critical to the danger of "spiritual transfer."

A. The Danger of "Spiritual Contamination"

In ancient traditions, the laying on of hands was not just a symbolic gesture but a literal channel.

- **Biblical Warning:** The Bible warns that you should not "unite yourself with the sins of others."
- **Occult Parallel:** By laying on hands without discernment, a transfer of the wrong "spirit" or energy can occur. In the occult world, this is called **"spiritual contamination."** If the person laying on hands (or the one receiving) is not pure, the ritual becomes a vehicle for something that has nothing to do with God.

B. From Leader to Recipient (The Polluted Worker)

This is where "hierarchical idolatry" becomes dangerous. When people put a pastor on a pedestal, they believe everything coming from that person is "holy."

- **The Danger:** If the leader is involved in occult practices, Freemasonry, or moral corruption, his hands serve as a bridge.
- **Pagan Parallel:** In ancient initiation rites, it was believed the "spirit" of the master passed into the disciple through touch. If the master held a "false spirit," the disciple was sealed with it.
- **Today:** People often drink spiritually from a polluted source because they trust the outward appearance (the suit, the stage, the charisma) instead of the fruit of the spirit.

C. From Recipient to Worker (The Infected Person)

The warning "neither be partaker of other men's sins" also means the worker exposes themselves to the spiritual burden of the person they are ministering to.

- **Spiritual "Backlash":** In deliverance work or general prayer, the "contamination" (dark energy or demonic influence) can turn against the worker if they were not sent by God for that specific task.
- **The "Hasty" Mistake:** By laying on hands hastily, the worker steps outside of God's protection and tries to solve the problem in their own strength. This is where the "infection" jumps—the worker becomes spiritually exhausted or attacked.

Why the Bible says: "Do Not Be Hasty"

This command exists for **spiritual quarantine**:

1. **Discernment:** You must first know what "spirit" you are dealing with before forming a physical and spiritual connection (the bridge of hands).
2. **Protection of the Holy:** It prevents ministry from becoming a "mechanical ritual" where hands are laid on everything that moves. It forces man to step back and hear God's voice rather than mimicking a pagan energy ritual.

D. Human Manipulation vs. Divine Will

The "hastiness" often occurs in modern "prophetic" or "healing" services.

- **Mass Ritual:** When the laying on of hands becomes a mass ritual (touching hundreds for an "experience"), it becomes a form of psychological manipulation.
- **The Switch:** It implies that human touch is the "switch" that turns God's power on or off. This turns a holy command into a magical technique that can be activated by man at any time.

E. The Role of the "Intermediary"

By placing such a strong focus on the laying on of hands, the minister or priest becomes the essential "intermediary"—just like ancient pagan priests. It teaches people to look to a man's hands for a blessing instead of going directly to God. It is a subtle form of idolatry where the human instrument becomes more important than the Source.

2.6.6. Spiritual Obedience in the Laying on of Hands and Prayers

In the context of "stealing" God's place, this is the final step: man usurping the authority of the Holy Spirit.

A. The Sin of Presumption

Laying on hands without the leading of the Holy Spirit is to assume that God *must* work simply because we perform a physical act.

- **The Pagan Error:** In sorcery and heathen rituals, it is believed that if you say the right words and perform the right gestures, the spirit world is "obligated" to respond.
- **The Biblical Corrective:** The Holy Spirit is a Person, not a power source that we can "tap" whenever we please. To act without His voice is to set yourself above Him—the very core of idolatry.

B. The Holy Spirit as "Border Control"

The Holy Spirit is the only One who truly knows what hides in a person's heart or spirit.

- **The Filter:** He serves as a "filter." Sometimes He restrains a worker from laying on hands because the timing is not right, or because the person first needs to show repentance.
- **The Risk:** If man ignores that warning (being "hasty"), he breaks the protection the Holy Spirit offers, exposing both himself and the other person to contamination.

C. The Discernment of Spirits

The Bible states that the Holy Spirit gives the "gift of discernment."

- Without this gift, the laying on of hands is like playing with high-voltage wires in the dark.
- Many of the "Masonic symbols" and "pagan remnants" we have discussed flourish specifically in churches where the Holy Spirit's guidance has been replaced by systems, traditions, and outward show.

D. Acts Contrary to His Will

When an act is performed against the will of the Holy Spirit, it becomes **"strange fire"** (similar to the sons of Aaron in the Old Testament).

- It may look impressive on a stage—people may fall over or become emotional—but if it is not from the Spirit, it is a man-made counterfeit.
- This is how the "Santas" and "Easter Bunnies" of the religious world are born—they look good and do "wonderful" things, but they steal the glory that belongs to God alone.

Summary: Reclaiming the Truth

We have reached the end of this deep dive into the shadows of tradition. Whether it is the shape of a gingerbread man, the timing of a festival, or the way we pray, the message is consistent: **God will not share His glory with another.**

The "Driver" (the soul) must now choose to step away from the "Business Model" of the church and return to a life of true discernment, led by the Spirit and anchored in the Word.

2.6.7. The Circle, Ring, or Circuit

Psalm 1:1 warns against the wrong kind of "circle" or company: *"Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat [circle] of the scornful."* The symbol of the "circle" is a central image in both Christianity and Paganism, but the meanings differ fundamentally.

A. The Pagan Input: The Magic Circle

In Paganism (such as Wicca, Druidism, and ancient heathen rituals), the circle is sacred and essential.

- **Control and Protection:** A circle is "cast" to create a sacred space where energy is built up. It serves as a boundary to keep evil spirits out and the power of the group in.
- **Lack of Hierarchy:** In a circle, everyone is equal. There is no "head" because divinity is found in the center or within the people themselves.
- **Nature Cycles:** It represents the circle of life, the seasons, and the repetition of reincarnation—a closed system where man and nature are one.

B. The Christian Input: Fellowship vs. Idolatry

In Christianity, there are two sides to the "circle":

- **Biblical Fellowship:** There is nothing wrong with people standing in a circle to pray (like a prayer circle), provided the focus is upward toward God. This represents unity.
- **The "Circle of Scorners" (Ps. 1:1):** This circle is a group of people who justify each other's sins and errors. They close themselves off from God's correction and create their own "truth."
- **The Danger of "Circle Worship":** When modern churches focus purely on the "energy" or the "feeling" of the group within a circle, they move closer to pagan ritual. The Biblical model is often people bowing down *before* God (hierarchy: God above, man below), not people "worshiping" or "giving power" to each other in a ring.

C. Connecting the "Circle" to Superstition

If we link the circle symbol to the earlier themes of salt, ash, and pork fat:

- These are all attempts to draw a "circle" of safety to replace God's sovereignty.
- People nailing bacon to walls are essentially trying to draw a "magic circle" around their home. They trust the boundaries *they* set, instead of the God who set the boundaries of the universe.

D. The "Circle of Scorners" in the Modern Church

The modern "Super Pastor" and his loyal followers often form a closed circle. They protect one another and lash out at anyone suggesting the leader is wrong. They sit in the circle of the scornful—mocking God's holiness by thinking they are above His laws.

Key Difference: The pagan draws a circle for power; the modern Christian often draws a circle for protection against criticism. Both forget that true safety lies not in the shape of the circle, but in faithfulness to the Word.

2.7. Church Architecture

2.7.1. The Church Steeple (Tower)

Some critics of modern church buildings point to the steeple as a remnant of ancient pagan architecture.

- **Pagan Roots:** It is sometimes argued that high, pointed steeples resemble **Egyptian obelisks** or **Mesopotamian ziggurats**. These were intended to "touch" the heavens or served as phallic symbols of fertility and power. In ancient sun worship, the obelisk represented a frozen ray of the sun-god.
- **Christian Meaning:** In the modern church, it is viewed as a symbol that directs the eye "upward" toward God. Practically, it served as the belfry where the bell hung to call the community to worship.
- **The Tension:** While the intent today is often innocent, the architectural "language" remains tied to the ancient human desire to build a "Tower of Babel"—to reach God through human construction and monumentalism rather than through a humble spirit.

Summary of the "Circle" and the "Steeple"

Whether we are standing in a ring or building towers to the sky, the danger remains the same: **The shift from the Creator to the creation.** When the ritual of the circle or the status of the building becomes more important than the Truth of the Gospel, the church has successfully invited the "Trojan Horse" inside.

2.7.2. The Pulpit and the "Holy" Space

- **Orientation to the East:** Many older churches were built so that the pulpit and the congregation face East. This stems from ancient **sun worship**, where the rising sun was seen as a deity or source of life. The church reinterpreted this as the coming of the "Sun of Righteousness."
- **The Removal of the Pulpit:** In many modern churches, the traditional pulpit is disappearing. This has a significant symbolic impact:

- **The Old Meaning:** Traditionally, the pulpit was built high so that the Word of God was literally "above" man. It was a sacred space, often decorated with carvings that could contain hidden symbols (like the acorn or oak leaf, pagan symbols of strength and fertility).
- **The New Meaning:** By removing the pulpit and placing the preacher on the same level as the people (or on a stage), the "sacred space" is dismantled. In **Freemasonry**, the floor of the temple is often a black-and-white checkered pattern to represent the balance between good and evil. Many modern churches use these minimalist, geometric designs on their stages without realizing their occult origins.

2.7.3. Halos in Religious Art

The golden circle or ring of light around the heads of saints or Jesus in church paintings is not originally Christian.

- **Sun Gods:** In Greek and Roman art, gods like **Helios** or **Apollo** were depicted with a radiant crown to show their divinity and connection to the sun. Early Christian artists adopted this visual language to distinguish important figures.

2.7.4. The Use of Candles for Prayer

While candles symbolize light, burning them for specific requests or for the deceased is a practice that existed in ancient Roman and Greek paganism.

- **Votive Offerings:** The idea was that the smoke from the candle carries the prayer to the gods, or that the fire acts as a sacrifice to win the favor of a deity.

2.7.5. Church Bells: Sound as a Spiritual Weapon

Church bells are considered "traditional" today, but their origin in the church is rooted in a fear of the supernatural.

- **Driving away Demons:** Originally, ringing bells or making loud noises was a common pagan method to drive away evil spirits and "demons of the air" (especially during storms or rites of passage like births and deaths). In the Middle Ages, it was believed that lightning and plagues were caused by "spirits of the air."
- **Sonic Exorcism:** When a storm arose, the priest would order the bells to be rung. The goal was not to warn people, but to terrify and expel the demons in the sky with the "sanctified sound" of the metal.
- **Inscriptions:** Many old church bells bear inscriptions such as *"Vivos voco, mortuos plango, fulgura frango"*—meaning: "I call the living, I mourn the dead, **I break the lightning**." The belief that a sound can "break" lightning is a direct superstition.

2.7.6. The Sun as the Source of Divinity

In almost all ancient pagan cultures, the sun was the supreme deity.

- **Helios and Mithras:** These light-gods were depicted with rays of light emanating from their heads.
- **The "Nimbus" (Halo):** Early Christian artists used the **nimbus** (the technical name for the halo) because it was the visual language people already understood. To distinguish Jesus, they created the *cruciform halo* (a cross within the circle).
- **Connection to the "Queen of Heaven":** Just as the cakes were baked for her, **Mary** is often depicted with a crown of twelve stars or a massive golden halo. This mirrors the depiction of the Egyptian goddess **Isis** or the Roman goddess **Diana**, transferring the divine attributes of ancient mother-goddesses onto a Biblical figure.

2.7.7. The "Baptismal Font"

Many old baptismal fonts are **octagonal** (eight-sided).

- **Numerology:** In ancient paganism, the number **8** was the number of "new beginnings" and the rebirth of the sun.
- **Geometry:** This shape was common in ancient Roman baths and temples. The church adopted it to symbolize the "new birth" of baptism, but the geometry itself is tied to ancient solar symbolism.

2.7.8. The "Amen": An Ancient Confirmation

While "Amen" is Hebrew for "so be it" or "certainly," there is a debate regarding its connection to ancient Egypt.

- **Amun (Amen):** Researchers point to the phonetic similarity with the Egyptian god **Amun** (the "Hidden One"). In Egyptian temples, his name was shouted to confirm a prayer or hymn.
- **Function:** Even if the theological intent differs today, the function remains the same as in ancient rituals: it acts as a "seal" or a "magic closing word" to send a request into the spiritual realm.

2.7.9. Closing Eyes: Visual Isolation against "Temptation"

There is no command in the Bible that a person *must* close their eyes to pray (in fact, many Biblical figures looked toward heaven with open eyes). Closing one's eyes stems from a mixture of ancient philosophy and superstition:

- **Closing off the World:** In early esoteric and pagan traditions, it was believed that the senses (especially sight) bound a person to the "illusion" of the material world. By closing your eyes, you "leave" the physical realm to enter the spiritual one.

- **Protection from the Holy:** There was also an ancient superstition that looking upon the divine (or a holy apparition) could blind or kill a person. Closing the eyes was a sign of fear and respect for the "overwhelming light" of a deity.

2.7.10. Bowing the Head: The Posture of a Slave

In the research of "stealing" God's attributes, the bowing of the head is a direct transfer of political subservience to religion:

- **Roman Surrender:** In the ancient Roman world, a victor would place his foot on the neck of a conquered enemy. the enemy had to bow his neck as a sign that he placed his life in the hands of the victor.
- **Exposure of the Neck:** By bowing your head, you expose your most vulnerable part (the neck). In pagan sacrificial rituals, the animal's head was bowed before it was slaughtered. In the church, this became a "normal" sign of humility, but it originates as the posture of a prisoner before a tyrant or a victim before an altar.

2.7.11. The Sign of the Cross: A Magical Protection

In the early centuries of the church, it was believed that the air was literally filled with demons waiting for an opportunity to enter the human soul or body.

- **The Seal (Sphragis):** Before the cross was a common symbol, people in the ancient world used a "mark" to show ownership. The church taught that the sign of the cross placed an invisible seal on the body.
- **Driving away Demons:** The superstition was that demons feared the cross-symbol so much that they would flee if you made the sign over yourself. It was often done when someone was startled, before eating, or when passing an "unclean" place (like a pagan temple).
- **Pagan Roots:** Many ancient cultures used an "X" or a cross as a sign of protection. The Egyptian **Ankh** was a symbol of life that protected against death. The church simply adapted this universal need for a "magical gesture" into the Christian cross.

2.7.12. Incense: The "Scent" of Prayer

- **Idolatry in Antiquity:** Incense was the core of almost every ancient pagan sacrificial ritual. It was used to please the gods with a "sweet savor" so they would look more favorably upon the sacrifice.
- **Masking the Smell:** During animal sacrifices, incense served a practical (and gruesome) purpose: it masked the smell of burning flesh and blood in the temple.
- **Spiritual Smoke:** The church uses it today as a symbol of prayers ascending to God, but the ritual of "cleansing" a person or object with smoke (**smudging**) is a practice found in almost every early pagan culture.

2.7.13. The Origin of Vestments (Robes)

A. The Priest in a Special Robe

- **The "Magical" Garment:** In ancient pagan cultures (like Egypt and Babylon), the priest had to wear a special robe to protect himself from the "energy" of the deity. Without his "uniform," he was vulnerable.
- **Distinction from the "Commoner":** The robe was intended to hide the humanity of the priest. He was not to look like an ordinary man, but like a conduit for the divine. This is a form of **hierarchical idolatry**, making one man appear "holier" than another based on his clothing.

B. The Suit and Tie: The "Business God"

As churches moved away from liturgical robes, the suit and tie became the new standard (especially in the 20th century).

- **The Superstition of "Respect":** An unwritten rule emerged that you must wear your "best clothes" for God. This is a transfer of ancient court etiquette where one could not appear before a king without the correct attire.
- **Status:** The suit gave the preacher the status of a professional (like a lawyer or doctor), placing him above the "ordinary people" in the pews.

C. The Modern "Casual" Shift: A New Ritual?

Today we see preachers in jeans and sneakers. While this seems like a break from tradition, it often creates a new type of image-worship:

- **The "Relatable" Leader:** Instead of the priest-figure, the preacher becomes a "celebrity" or "influencer." The focus shifts from the office to the personality.
- **Adaptability:** Just as the early church adapted pagan symbols to attract people, the modern church adapts pop culture. This can become a "cult of personality," which is another form of man-worship.

2.7.14. The Church Building as a "Stage"

In modern churches, the altar and pulpit often vanish, replaced by a stage equipped with professional lighting and smoke machines.

- **The Smoke Machine Connection:** It is fascinating that modern churches use fog machines for effect. In the context of pagan practices, this links directly to the ancient use of smoke (incense) to create a mystical atmosphere and manipulate the senses.
- **Dark Auditoriums:** Many modern churches are pitch black inside, with only spotlights on the stage. This mirrors ancient **"mystery religions"** where rituals took place in cellars or caves to create a sense of exclusivity and heighten emotional manipulation.

2.7.15. The "All-Seeing Eye"

This is perhaps the most famous symbol found in many older churches (often above the pulpit or in stained-glass windows).

- **Pagan Origin:** This is the **Eye of Horus** from ancient Egypt, representing the sun-god who sees all.
- **The Shift:** In the church, it is explained as the "Eye of God" watching over the congregation. However, in Freemasonry, it represents the "Great Architect of the Universe"—a deistic god who is not necessarily the Biblical God. It "steals" the concept of God's omniscience and repackages it in an occult symbol.

2.7.16. The "Cross" on the Tower vs. The Weathercock

Have you noticed that many old churches have a rooster (weathercock) on top of the steeple instead of a cross?

- **The Rooster:** The rooster is an ancient symbol for the rising sun. Because it announces the day, pagan cultures viewed it as the guardian against the spirits of the night.
- **The Excuse:** By placing a rooster atop the tower, the church positioned an ancient solar symbol above God's house, often using the excuse that it represents Peter's denial.

2.7.17. The Obelisk: The Sunbeam in Stone

You will often see obelisks as monuments in graveyards or even in front of great cathedrals (like the one in the center of St. Peter's Square in the Vatican).

- **Pagan Origin:** In ancient Egypt, the obelisk was a symbol of the sun-god **Ra**. It was considered a "petrified sunbeam." It also served as a phallic symbol, representing fertility and the creative power of nature.
- **Masons and Death:** Many Freemasons chose the obelisk as a headstone because, to them, it symbolizes "resurrection" through man's own power and wisdom, rather than through the grace of God.
- **Why in the Church?** The church often brought these obelisks from Egypt and "baptized" them by placing a cross on top. This was meant to show Christianity's victory over paganism, but by leaving the symbol standing, they retained ancient solar energy in the heart of the church.

2.7.18. The Celtic Cross: The Cross in the Circle

The Celtic cross (with a circle behind the crossbeams) is a popular Christian symbol, but its circle tells a different story.

- **The Sun-Wheel:** The circle behind the cross is an ancient pagan symbol for the sun (the Sun-Wheel). In early Celtic cultures, the sun was worshipped as a deity.
- **Adaptation:** When missionaries like St. Patrick sought to convert the Celts, they placed the Christian cross over the sun-wheel, telling the people that Jesus is the "new sun." This merges the worship of the Creator with the worship of creation.

2.7.19. The Direction of Graves: "Ad Orientem"

Most graves in old churchyards lie in the same direction.

- **The Superstition:** There is a centuries-old tradition that the dead must be buried with their feet facing East.
- **The Reason:** This is based on the idea that when Jesus returns, He will come from the East (like the rising sun).
- **The Pagan Root:** This is a direct remnant of **Sun Worship**. Ancient people aligned their dead with the rising sun so they could be "awakened" by the sun-god in the next life. The church simply gave this solar ritual a Christian name.

2.7.20. The "Gargoyles" on Church Roofs

In many older cathedrals, one sees gruesome stone monsters (gargoyles) on the roofs.

- **The Superstition:** Although they serve as water spouts, the superstition behind them was that they "drive away evil spirits with evil." The idea was that a spirit would be so frightened by the ugly image on the roof that it would not enter the church.
- **Idolatry:** This is a form of **apotropaic magic** (magic intended to ward off bad luck). It implies that God's presence in the church is not enough to protect the building, and that man needs "monsters" for security.

2.7.21. The Candle: Controlling the "Holy Fire"

Candles are used in almost every Christian tradition, from the Advent wreath to lighting a small candle for a loved one.

- **Fire Worship:** In ancient times, fire was the most direct symbol of the deity. The "Eternal Flame" in the temples of the Roman goddess **Vesta** was tended by virgins; if the flame went out, it was believed the city would fall.
- **The Magical Conduit:** In pagan rituals, it was believed that lighting a candle attracts the attention of a specific spirit or god. The smoke is viewed as the "conveyor belt" for human requests to reach the heavens.
- **Christmas Candles:** Putting candles in windows during winter stems from the pagan need to welcome the "return of the sun" during the darkest time of year. The church retained this solar magic by labeling Jesus the "Light of the World" while maintaining the physical candle as a necessary ritual tool.

2.7.22. The Fish (Ichthys): Fertility from the Water

People often think the fish symbol (two intersecting arcs) is merely a secret code used by early Christians. While true in practice, the shape itself is far older and steeped in idolatry.

- **The "Vesica Piscis":** This shape (the overlap of two circles) is a fundamental symbol in sacred geometry and Freemasonry.
- **The Mother Goddess:** In ancient Mesopotamian and Syrian cultures, the fish was a symbol of the fertility goddess **Atargatis** or the fish-god **Dagon**. The shape of the fish was often associated with the female womb and the creation of life.
- **The Pope’s Mitre:** Have you noticed that the Pope’s hat (the mitre) looks like an open fish mouth from the side? Many researchers link this directly to the priests of **Dagon**, who wore garments shaped like fish to show their connection to water deities.

2.7.23. The Advent Wreath: A Circle of Time

The wreath with its four candles is a modern church fixture, but its form is purely pagan:

- The circle is the pagan **"Wheel of the Year."**
- The candles represent the four cardinal points or the four elements (earth, air, fire, water).
- By placing it in the church, we unconsciously repeat the ancient European ritual of appeasing winter spirits so that the sun may return.

2.8. Themes from Freemasonry

A. Pillars: Boaz and Jachin

Many traditional church buildings feature two large pillars at the entrance.

- While they ostensibly refer to Solomon's Temple, the focus on two pillars is a central theme in **Freemasonry**, representing duality.
- The superstition here is that the building itself is a "gateway" to another dimension of knowledge. Walking between these symbols repeats an initiation ritual that has no Biblical basis.

B. The Square and Compass

Subtle versions of this symbol are often found in the masonry of old churches.

- The square represents the earth (the material), and the compass represents heaven (the spiritual).
- The **"G"** often found in the center is interpreted by Masons as "God" or "Geometry." This fits your theory that human intellect and science (geometry) attempt to take the place of divine revelation.

C. The Pentagram or the "Blazing Star"

In some older church windows, you can find five-pointed stars.

- While the church calls it the "Star of Bethlehem," in the occult world, the pentagram represents the five elements or "Man as a God" (with the head, arms, and legs forming the points).

D. Why Are These Retained?

- **Ignorance:** Most modern congregants and leaders simply do not know what these symbols mean. They see them as "art."
- **Tradition:** In historic buildings, heritage laws often prevent the removal of such symbols.

- **Syncretism:** This is the blending of different faiths. The church believed they could "purify" these symbols, but as you noted, the original pagan or Masonic energy remains attached to them.

How These Symbols "Steal" God's Place

1. **Tangible Reliance:** Instead of relying on an invisible God, people begin to trust the act: *"If I light the candle, my prayer will be heard."* This is the definition of superstition.
2. **The Fish as a Talisman:** Just as ancient people wore amulets for luck, people today put the fish on their cars as a "sign of protection." This turns a spiritual truth into a physical lucky charm, which is a form of idolatry.

2.9. Other Common Customs

A. April Fools' Day

April Fools' Day is one of the most interesting customs because it holds no official religious significance in the church, yet it is deeply rooted in ancient cultures. While the exact origin is "murky," there are three primary theories linked to pagan roots or calendar shifts:

- **The Festival of Hilaria (Roman Origin):**
  - The most direct pagan precursor is likely the Roman festival **Hilaria**, celebrated on March 25th.
  - **What it was:** A joyful festival held in honor of the goddess **Cybele** (the Great Mother).
  - **The Customs:** People dressed in masquerades and played pranks on anyone, including high-ranking officials. It was a day of "misrule" where normal social hierarchies were briefly suspended.
- **The Calendar Change of 1582:**
  - This is the most common "historical" explanation. Before the introduction of the **Gregorian calendar** (by Pope Gregory XIII), many parts of Europe celebrated the New Year around the vernal equinox (March 21st) through April 1st.
  - When the New Year was moved to January 1st, some people—either because they hadn't heard the news or out of stubbornness—continued to celebrate on April 1st.
  - These people were mocked as "fools." In France, they were called *"Poisson d'Avril"* (April Fish)—symbolizing a young, naive fish that is easily caught (tricked).
- **The "Foolishness" of Mother Nature:**
  - In many pagan traditions, late March and early April was seen as a time of struggle between winter and spring.
  - **The Prank:** The weather could be warm and sunny one day (spring) and snowy the next (winter). It was believed that nature or the "spirits" were

playing tricks on humans. April Fools' was a way to celebrate this unpredictability.

- **Persian and Hindu Connections:**
  - **Sizdah Bedar (Persia):** A festival celebrated since at least 536 B.C. on the 13th day of the Persian New Year (usually April 1st or 2nd). It involves jokes and spending time in nature to shake off bad luck.
  - **Holi (India):** A Hindu festival of colors and fun celebrated in March, where people throw colored powder and play pranks on one another.

B. Throwing Salt over the Shoulder

This is usually done after someone spills salt, intended to ward off "bad luck."

- **The Origin:** In ancient times, salt was extremely expensive and precious (often used as currency). To spill it was seen as a dire omen of waste and misfortune.
- **The Superstition:** It was believed that the devil (or evil spirits) always lurks just behind your left shoulder, waiting for a moment of weakness or accident to strike.
- **The Action:** By throwing a pinch of the spilled salt over your **left shoulder**, you intended to "blind" the devil so he could not seize the opportunity to torment you further.
- **The Christian Connection:** In Leonardo da Vinci's famous painting, *The Last Supper*, Judas Iscariot is depicted having knocked over a salt cellar—forever linking the act of spilling salt to betrayal and ill-fortune in the Western mind.

C. "Touch Wood" (Knock on Wood)

People usually say this after expressing a positive hope for the future, out of fear that they might "jinx" it or that fate will turn against them.

- **Pagan Origin:** Many ancient cultures (such as the Celts and Germanic tribes) believed that good spirits and deities resided within trees.
- **The Action:** If you said something good about yourself or your future, you touched the tree or knocked on it to invoke the protection of the gods, or to thank the spirits so they wouldn't become jealous and take your luck away.
- **The "Christian" Adaptation:** In later years, the church attempted to "Christianize" this by claiming that "touching wood" referred to the wood of the **Cross of Christ**. By touching wood, you were supposedly asking for His protection. However, this was merely a way to overlay a pagan habit with a religious excuse.

How these "Small" Customs Steal God's Place

Though these acts seem harmless or "just for fun," they reinforce a mindset of **fear and manipulation**:

1. **Reliance on Ritual:** Instead of trusting in the sovereignty of God, the person relies on a physical ritual (throwing salt, knocking on wood) to control their future.
2. **Fear of the "Jinx":** It creates a belief system where God's blessing can be easily stolen by "fate" or "spirits" unless we perform a specific gesture. This is the very definition of a pagan worldview—trying to appease fickle spirits rather than resting in a faithful Creator.

2.10. "Innocent Fun" and the Dangers of These "Games"

It is fascinating how these activities are often presented as "harmless fun" at parties or social gatherings, while their roots lie in the deepest forms of occultism and paganism. It is vital to point out that these are not merely "games," but rituals designed to obtain information or experiences outside the physical realm.

A. Fortune Telling (Divination)

The origin of all fortune telling is **Divination**—the attempt to learn the will of the gods or the future without God.

- **Tarot Cards:** Originated in 15th-century Italy as playing cards but were adapted by occultists in the 18th century. Each card symbolizes a spiritual journey. In the occult, cards are believed to be a "doorway" to the subconscious or spirit guides.
- **Tea Leaf Reading (Tasseography):** Roots in ancient China and later Europe. The idea is that tea leaf remnants form patterns influenced by "spirits" or energy to convey messages.
- **Palmistry (Chiromancy):** Originates from ancient Indian astrology and spread through Greece. The lie here is that your fate is "written" in your body and can be deciphered without trusting God.
- **Crystal Ball (Scrying):** Using crystals or mirrors to obtain visions. Originates in ancient Egypt and Babylon. It is based on the medium entering a trance to communicate with "the other side."

B. Astral Projection (Out-of-Body Experience)

Often presented in modern "New Age" circles as a form of deep meditation.

- **The Origin:** Derived from ancient Hinduism and the Egyptian belief that the soul (*Ka*) can step out of the body.
- **The Danger:** In Christianity, this is seen as extreme danger because you leave your body "open" and unprotected. You exit the protection God provided for your physical existence and enter a realm where you have no control over the spirits you encounter.

C. Mirror Games (Ouija or "Glassy-Glassy")

Perhaps the most dangerous because it looks like a children's game.

- **The Origin:** The modern Ouija board was patented in 19th-century America during the "Spiritualism" movement, but the use of an alphabet circle dates back to ancient China (600 A.D.).
- **The "Circle" Again:** Note that the alphabet is placed in a ring—the same **magic circle** discussed earlier.
- **The Mechanism:** Participants believe they are communicating with the dead. From a Biblical perspective, they are opening a door for "familiar spirits" who possess information about people and use it to manipulate them through fear.

D. The Pendulum

Using a ring on a string or a crystal on a chain to answer questions (often used to "predict" a baby's gender).

- **The Origin:** Known as **Radiesthesia**, it operates on the same principle as dowsing or divination.
- **The Danger:** It teaches people to consult a physical object for guidance instead of praying. This is a direct form of idolatry, asking the "spirit of the object" to reveal truth.

E. Horoscopes and Astrology

So common they appear in Sunday newspapers. People often say, "I only read it for fun."

- **The Origin:** Ancient Babylonia. It is the belief that the stars and planets (the creation) control your life.
- **The Biblical Perspective:** God made the stars, but we are forbidden from worshipping or consulting them. When you plan your day according to a "zodiac sign," you exchange the Creator for the creation. This is paganism in its most socially acceptable form.

F. Yoga and "Chakra" Meditation

Offered in almost every gym as mere "exercise."

- **The Origin:** Yoga comes from Hinduism. The word means **"yoke"** or "union" with the gods (*Brahman*). The various positions (*asanas*) were originally designed as worship postures for specific pagan deities.
- **The Danger:** The goal is to "empty" the mind. In Christianity, we are called to fill our minds with the Word, not to empty them so that any influence can enter.

G. "Lucky Charms" and Good Luck Tokens

Whether it’s a specific stone, a lucky charm, or a "boerseun-rekkie" (rubber band) for luck.

- **The Origin:** This is **Fetishism**—the belief that an inanimate object possesses supernatural power to protect you.
- **The Link to the Pork Fat Story:** This is the same spirit. Whether it is bacon on a wall or a crystal around your neck, you are saying: "God’s protection is not enough; I need this object."

H. "Wishing on a Star" or "Blowing a Wish"

Teaching children to wish on a falling star or blow dandelion seeds.

- **The Root:** Belief in the "Power of the Universe" or fate. It teaches a child from a young age that there are forces that can fulfill desires outside of God.

"Food for Thought":

Use these points to show the contrast between God's Kingdom and the world's:

1. **Control vs. Trust:** Fortune telling tries to *control* the future. The God of Noah and Abraham asks us to *trust* Him with the future.
2. **The Source of Information:** In these "games," the source of knowledge is a human or an object (card, tea, glass). In Christianity, the **Word of God** is the only source of spiritual truth.
3. **The Deception of "Fun":** The world calls it "fun" so that people lower their defenses. This is exactly how Christianity is "thrown out the door"—by replacing it with exciting but dangerous alternatives that pique human curiosity.

Why are these "innocent" things so dangerous for the Christian?

A. It creates a spiritual blind spot

If a Christian reads their horoscope on Monday, does yoga on Tuesday, and swings a pendulum for fun on Wednesday, their spirit becomes so "contaminated" with the world's methods that they can no longer discern the voice of God.

- **The "Broken Compass":** This is why some ministers can literally or figuratively "throw the Bible to the floor"—they have swallowed too many of the world's methods and lost their own spiritual compass.
- **The Vanishing Distinction:** This is why the world "throws Christianity out the door"—because Christians who engage in these things look exactly like the pagans. There is no longer a distinction.

B. Biblical Primary Sources (The Foundation)

These are the "Gold Standard" scriptures that prove God forbids these practices:

- **Deuteronomy 18:10-12:** The most comprehensive list against divination, sorcery, consulting spirits, and questioning the dead (Ouija, fortune telling).
- **Leviticus 19:31 & 20:6:** Warnings against visiting mediums and "whoring after" familiar spirits.
- **Acts 16:16-19:** The account of the slave girl with a "spirit of divination" (fortune telling) whom Paul had to deliver.

C. Closing the Door

Practices like astral projection and other occult acts require **consent and desire**. You must surrender your will to begin the "journey." Because you did not have the curiosity or the urge for that type of power, the enemy could not gain a foothold. **Your sobriety is your shield.**

2.11. Other Figures from Fables, Myths, and Folklore

A. The Tooth Mouse (or Tooth Fairy)

It seems innocent, but the pattern is identical to the "Trojan Horse" deities:

- **Omniscience:** The Tooth Mouse "knows" exactly when a child has lost a tooth, even if it happens in the middle of the night or away from home.
- **Infiltration of the Home:** Just as Santa comes down the chimney, the mouse or fairy enters the bedroom unobserved—a space that is meant to be sacred and private.
- **The Sacrifice:** The child leaves an "offering" (the tooth) under the pillow, and in exchange, a material reward (money) is left. This is a direct remnant of ancient **sacrificial rituals** where people offered body parts or food to win the favor of household spirits.

B. "The Elf on the Shelf" (The Modern Spy)

This is a modern tradition rapidly gaining the status of a superstition.

- **The Spy Concept:** The elf is placed in the home as a direct spy for Santa. He moves to a new location every night to watch the children from every angle.
- **Omniscience through Surveillance:** It teaches children they are never alone and that their deeds are constantly being reported by a supernatural being. It replaces the Biblical concept of the **Holy Spirit** (who convicts of sin) with a physical doll that "tattles."

C. Gnomes and "Little People" (Folkloric Figures)

In many European cultures (Irish Leprechauns or Scandinavian Tomte), these figures were pervasive.

- **House Guardians:** These beings were believed to be perpetually present in the home or on the farm, watching everything the family did.
- **Reward and Punishment:** If not treated correctly (e.g., leaving out a bowl of porridge), they would make livestock sick or break things in the house.
- **Animism:** This is the definition of **animism**—the belief that nature and the home are full of minor "gods" controlling your life. The church never fully uprooted these beliefs; they simply live on today as "cute" stories.

D. The Sandman (Klaas Vakie)

The figure who sprinkles sand in children's eyes so they can sleep.

- **Control over the Spirit:** He possesses power over the dream world and the subconscious. He "knows" when you sleep and controls what you see when your eyes are closed.
- **The Hijack:** This usurps the attribute of God as the **Guardian** who "neither slumbers nor sleeps" (Psalm 121:4).

2.11.E. The Chinese Dragon and Lion Dance (Spiritual Ritual)

Although marketed today as tourism and "culture," its roots are deeply anchored in pagan spiritualism (Animism and Taoism):

- **The Dragon (Loong):** In Eastern culture, the dragon is not a symbol of evil (as in the Bible), but a symbol of power and fertility. The dance is performed to appease the "Rain God" for a good harvest. It is, therefore, a form of **fertility ritual**.
- **Expelling Evil Spirits:** The primary reason for the dance (especially the Lion Dance with loud drums and crackers) is to scare away "Nian" or evil spirits. The movements of the "serpent" or dragon are designed to **manipulate energy (Chi)** in the environment.
- **Consecrating the Mask:** Before the dance begins, there is often a ritual where the eyes of the dragon/lion are "opened" with red paint. It is believed that the spirit of the creature then **animates** the costume.

The Spiritual Risk: By participating in the Dragon Dance, a person (often unknowingly) takes part in a ritual designed to manipulate spirits and honor idols.

- **The "Circus" Effect:** People love the colors and excitement. They think: "It's just a dance."
- **Spiritual Blindness:** Just as with Easter eggs, people see the outward form but ignore the spiritual source.
- **Blurring Boundaries:** When the church allows these types of rituals to move in—often under the guise of "multiculturalism"—the Christian loses the ability to discern between what is holy and what is pagan.

2.12. Common Grace vs. Separation

Common Grace is a theological concept used to explain why so many good, beautiful, and true things still exist in the world outside the church—including in cultures that were originally "heathen."

A. What is Common Grace?

Unlike saving grace (which is only for believers), Common Grace is God's favor that shines on everyone—believer or unbeliever.

- **Biblical Basis:** *"He makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust"* (Matthew 5:45).

- **The Purpose:** It restrains humanity from becoming as evil as they possibly could be. It enables unbelievers to advance science, create beautiful art, make good laws, and find medical breakthroughs.

B. How it Relates to "Paganism"

If one believes in Common Grace, their view of pagan cultures shifts:

- **The "Golden Fragments":** Theologians like John Calvin and Abraham Kuyper argued that even in pagan cultures, God's truth shimmered through. Because all humans are created in the **Image of God**, pagan philosophers or artists could occasionally stumble upon "truth" (such as certain moral codes or architectural beauty).
- **Reclaiming Symbols:** This means the church does not have to fear something just because it has a "pagan" origin. If a certain symbol or custom (like a ring or an architectural style) reflects something of God's order or beauty, the church can **"reclaim"** it for God.

C. "Redemption" of Symbols (Reformation of Culture)

Those who think from this framework believe that nothing in creation belongs to the devil. Everything belongs to God, but man has misused it.

- **Example:** A pagan festival for the solstice was a misplaced search for "light." The church then says: "You are searching for light, but here is the **True Light (Jesus)**." They do not reject the *idea* of a festival, but they restore the *focus*.

D. The Contrast: The Doctrine of Separation

In contrast to Common Grace stands the **Doctrine of Separation**, which is closer to the perspective of your current research:

- **Total Corruption:** This view states that the world (and everything "pagan") is totally corrupt.
- **Spiritual Adultery:** Any blending with pagan roots is seen as spiritual harlotry.
- **The Focus:** *"Come out from among them and be ye separate"* (2 Corinthians 6:17).

The Infiltration of Modern Paganism and the Prosperity Gospel in the Contemporary Church

Research Focus: This study investigates the increasing phenomenon of neo-pagan elements within the modern Christian church, with a specific focus on the "Prosperity Gospel" and extra-Biblical manifestations, such as "falling backward under prayer." The purpose of the research is to identify the theological deviations of these practices and analyze their impact on the purity of the Biblical message.

Problem Statement: In a growing number of modern congregations, the focus has shifted from the Cross-centered Gospel to a man-centered spirituality. This shift manifests in the manipulation of believers by "Super Pastors" who link financial gain (such as the "seed principle") to spiritual breakthroughs. Furthermore, physical manifestations—which show historical similarities to non-Christian trances and pagan rituals—are presented as the sole evidence of the Holy Spirit's work, often at the expense of the individual's physical and spiritual safety.

Methodology: The study utilizes a comparative analysis between modern church practices (based on primary sources such as video archives of prominent preachers) and the Biblical exegesis of church leadership, the work of the Holy Spirit, and the principles of generosity. The research relies heavily on New Testament warnings regarding the "great falling away" (apostasy).

Findings: The findings indicate that many modern church practices lie closer to pagan self-worship and magical manipulation than to historical Christian faith. The use of fear and guilt to "wring" finances from the poor, as well as the chaos of disorderly manifestations during sacraments like baptism, are identified as signs of Laodicean-type church decay.

Conclusion: The study concludes that the restoration of Biblical authority and the critical testing of spiritual experiences are essential to protect the church from the influence of modern paganism. The focus must return to the fruit of the Spirit—such as self-control and mercy—rather than the outward display of power and wealth.

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4. Paganism and the "Christianizing" of Symbols

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- **Cumont, Franz – *The Oriental Religions in Roman Paganism*:** Focuses on the influence of sun worship (Mithraism) on the early church and the origin of the halo.

5. Biblical Critiques of Idolatry and Tradition

- **Jeremiah 7 and 10:** Regarding the "Queen of Heaven" (cakes/buns) and the "tree cut from the forest" (Christmas tree).
- **Ezekiel 8:** Specifically refers to sun worship within the temple courts—a Biblical parallel to pagan symbols in the church.

6. Modern Sociology of the Church

- **Postman, Neil – *Amusing Ourselves to Death*:** Discusses how the modern church (with stages and lighting) transforms the "sacred" into entertainment.

7. Historical and Academic Sources

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- **Patrides, C.A. – *The Grand Design of God*:** Discusses how the early church adapted symbols like the fish (Ichthus) from the Greco-Roman world.

8. Investigative Christian Sources

- **Koch, Kurt – *Between Christ and Satan*:** A German theologian who documented thousands of cases regarding the spiritual consequences of "innocent fun" like pendulums and fortune-telling.
- **Michaelsen, Johanna – *The Beautiful Side of Evil*:** A personal testimony detailing the dangers of New Age practices like yoga and astral projection within the church.

Practical Research Note: Verifying Primary Video Evidence

To ensure a formal study remains objective, it is vital to verify "Super Pastor" controversies through primary video sources before they are removed.

1. **Seek Uncut Material:** Use full sermons to avoid "out of context" defenses. Use discernment-focused archives like *Justin Peters Ministries* or *Fighting for the Faith*.
2. **Keywords for Search:**
    - "Prosperity gospel preachers on tithing and poverty"
    - "Slain in the spirit during baptism fails"
    - "Benny Hinn/Kenneth Copeland financial manipulation techniques"
3. **Analyze the "Fruit":** Observe the comments section; when followers defend a preacher as a deity, it serves as evidence of a "cult of personality."
4. **Document Metadata:** Always record the **Broadcast Date**, **Sermon Title**, and the **Timestamp** (e.g., 14:22) for your bibliography.